

TOLSTOY

A PSYCHO-CRITICAL STUDY

by

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"Nietzsche and Modern Consciousness," etc.



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To
VALERIE COOPER

NOTE

THIS book, although complete in itself, is a companion volume to my earlier psycho-critical studies of Dostoevsky, Ibsen, and Nietzsche, also published by Messrs. Collins. Its aim is neither biography nor criticism in the ordinary sense, but rather an investigation of that psychological focus which may provide a key both to Tolstoy's personality and his work. The series of these studies will be concluded by a fifth, synthetic volume.

In so far as the quotations from English sources and translations are concerned, I made use chiefly of the following works : *Biryukov, Leo Tolstoy* (two volumes, Heinemann) ; *Aylmer Maude, The Life of Tolstoy* (two volumes, Constable), and *Leo Tolstoy* (Methuen) ; *Chertkov, The Last Days of Tolstoy* (Heinemann) ; *The Diaries of Tolstoy* (1 Vol., Dent) ; *The Journals of Tolstoy* (1895-1899, Knopf) ; *Tolstoy's Love Letters* ; *Gorky, Reminiscences of Tolstoy* ; *The Autobiography of Countess Tolstoya* ; *Goldenveizer, Talks with Tolstoy* (all four books published by

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the Hogarth Press) ; *War and Peace* (translated by Constance Garnett, Heinemann) ; *Confession* and *What I Believe* (translated by Aylmer Maude, in the World Classics Series) ; *Resurrection* (translated by Louise Maude, World Classics) ; *Childhood, Boyhood, Youth* ; *The Kingdom of God is Within You* ; *The Family Happiness* ; *The Kreutzer Sonata* (all published by W. Scott). Many quotations are from *The Complete Works of Count Leo Tolstoy* (edited and translated by Dr. Leo Wiener, Dent), and occasionally also from a few other English and American editions. Translations of several passages from Tolstoy's letters and diaries are my own.

J. L.

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CHAPTER I
GENERAL SURVEY

GENERAL SURVEY

I

LEO NIKOLAEVITCH TOLSTOY is one of the few writers of the last century whose greatness is no longer questioned but is accepted as something obvious and self-evident. Having stood the test of time, Tolstoy the artist can rightly claim the title of a true world-Classic, for his art is universal and so vital that it takes its place above all passing literary schools and fashions. Even the French, who do not easily give way to enthusiasm over foreign literatures, allow this puzzling Slav a place far above their best modern authors.

So early as 1885, Melchior de Voguë says in his well-known *Roman Russe*: "If those books are deemed the most interesting which faithfully represent a portion of humanity at any given moment, then our nineteenth century has produced nothing to equal Tolstoy's; nor has it produced anything more remarkable

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from a literary point of view. I do not hesitate to give it as my matured judgment that this author is one of the greatest of all the masters who bear witness to his century. . . . I am entirely of Flaubert's opinion, who, after reading a translation which Turgeniev had sent him, with a stamp of his foot expressed his feeling in a thundering voice : ' Why, this is Shakespeare. It is Shakespeare ! ' "—And another even more significant Frenchman, Romain Rolland, confessed considerably later : " To many of us the novels of Tolstoy were what *Werther* was to an earlier generation—the wonderful mirror of our passions, our strength, our weaknesses, of our hopes, our terrors, our discouragement. We were in no wise anxious to reconcile these many contradictions, still less did we concern ourselves to imprison this complex, multiple mind, full of echoes of the whole wide world, within the narrow limits of religious or political categories, as have the greater number of those who have written of Tolstoy in these latter years: incapable of extricating themselves from the conflict of parties, dragging him into the arena of their own passions, measuring him by the standards of their socialistic or clerical coteries. As if our coteries could be the measure of a genius! What is it to me if Tolstoy is or

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is not of my party? Shall I ask of what party Shakespeare was, or Dante, before I breathe the atmosphere of his magic or steep myself in its light?"

One could quote many other equally enthusiastic opinions on the part of French, English, Americans, Germans, Scandinavians, Italians and Spaniards,—opinions which prove beyond doubt that Tolstoy was one of the greatest spiritual forces in the literature of the nineteenth century. In addition, he died just on the threshold of an age whose destiny it is to sacrifice literature to the cinema and journalism; therefore he was perhaps the last European writer to be taken more or less seriously all over the world—from the farthest corners of America to the remote places of China, Japan, and India. His enigmatic personality looked—in any case from afar—like the figure of a mysterious giant astray in a world of dwarfs, and for this reason often appeared slightly tragi-comic in its very greatness. Towering above the rest in talents, in virtues and weaknesses, he seemed to have the natural right to judge, to condemn, or to approve. And this right was acknowledged. In an epoch when humanity was losing the last traces of its social, moral, and political conscience, the world was only too glad to bestow

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upon Tolstoy the title of the "conscience of Europe." Leaving thus the matter of conscience to him, it went on with its own affairs, pleasantly sure that conscience still existed—somewhere.

Those again who looked upon the drawbacks of modern "progress" with wide-open eyes found in Tolstoy an ally because he reminded them of Europe as little as possible. Tired of the noise of Industrialism, wearied with the moral, intellectual and mental prostitution that floods our civilised world, they could not fail to be impressed by the stern, white-bearded prophet of the Russian steppes, who suddenly denounced his literary genius, his wealth, his aristocratic title, and even began to till the ground—in peasant-garb and high-boots—like a real mujik. Was not he the man who made a tragedy of his family life because his wife and children did not allow him to distribute his property among the peasants and the poor? The man who, for the sake of his convictions, had the courage to resist the entire course of modern life, modern civilisation, and at last to flee away from family and home in order to die a unique death during his flight towards peace and loneliness?

What rich material for the weaving of mystery

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around the name of Tolstoy! And the eagerness with which so many Europeans seized this opportunity shows once again that in our age of levelling and self-complacent plebeianism we are yearning perhaps more than ever for exceptions, for romance of personality, for a man, in short, who is not afraid of thinking and acting otherwise than is prescribed by our professors, our parsons, and our morning papers.

II

Although the story of Tolstoy's life is too well known to need repetition in detail, it will nevertheless be helpful to point out a few of those factors and events that were important for the development of his mentality, as well as of his inner drama, with which alone we are here concerned.

Born in Yasnaya Polyana (1828) of an old family which had preserved all the patriarchal traditions of the Russian rural aristocracy, Tolstoy spent his early years in close contact with the infinite and mysterious landscape of Central Russia. The people he saw were for the most part unsophisticated peasants, old storytellers, pious pilgrims, and half-crazy godly

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simpletons like the "yurodivy" Grisha whom he describes in *Childhood*. His mother (*née* Princess Marie Volkonsky) died when he was only eighteen months old; but one of his distant relations, Tatyana Yergolsky, took care of him, his three elder brothers and his sister Maria. Later Tolstoy gave a striking portrait of his "Auntie" Tatyana in the meek, self-sacrificing Sonya in *War and Peace*. And in his autobiographic reminiscences he says emphatically that she had the greatest influence on his life. "This influence consisted first, in that ever since childhood she taught me the spiritual delight of love. She taught me this, but not in words: by her whole being she filled me with love. I saw, I felt how she enjoyed loving, and I understood the joy of love. This was the first thing."

It was probably due to this influence that even the games he played with his brothers in childhood were already tinged with that love for humanity and desire for universal happiness which became the main characteristic of his writings. In those very reminiscences we can detect three other early features typical of Tolstoy: one of them is the joyful, almost ecstatic awareness of his body and of the reality surrounding it. The second is his loud and

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indignant protest against things he himself does not approve. And the third his early hatred of violence and authority.

“I am sitting in a wooden trough,” he writes of the first conscious impression in his life, “and am enveloped by the new and not unpleasant smell of some kind of stuff with which my little body is being rubbed. It was probably bran, and most likely I was having a bath; but the novelty of the bath aroused me, and for the first time I remarked and liked my little body with the ribs showing on the breast, and the smooth, dark-coloured trough, my nurse’s rolled-up sleeves and the warm, steaming bran-water, and its sound; and especially the feeling of the smoothness of the trough’s edges when I passed my little hands along them.”

This joy in corporeal reality remained one of Tolstoy’s strongest instincts. But side by side we see in him an equally strong restraining counter-part: the consciousness of what is “not right.” Its first germs we can find also in the records of his childhood, especially in the description of a roundelay in which he and his German tutor, Teodor Ivanovitch, took part. “Among us there were women, strangers to us, and we all begin to circle round and jump; and Teodor Ivanovitch jumps, lifting his legs

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too high, flinging about and making a great noise; and I feel at one and the same moment that this is not right, and that it is wicked, and I rebuke him, and I think I begin to cry, and everything ceases."

The awareness and hatred of injustice were aroused in Tolstoy very early, by an apparently trifling personal episode. "I do not remember for what," he says, "but it was for something utterly undeserving of punishment that St. Thomas [his French tutor] locked me up in a room and threatened to flog me. Hereupon I had a dreadful feeling of anger, indignation, and disgust, not only towards St. Thomas himself, but towards the violence which it was intended to inflict upon me. Very likely this incident was the cause of the dreadful horror and repulsion towards every kind of violence which I have experienced all my life."

Another characteristic trait was his instinctive propensity to put every striking idea or desire into practice. As a boy of eight, he had an irresistible wish to fly—by sitting on his heels and clasping his arms round his knees. When he thus tried to fly away from the high window-sill of their house, he fell on the ground and was found unconscious, with a slight concussion of the brain. In *Boyhood* he relates

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that once the thought occurred to him that happiness depends not upon external conditions but on our personal relation to them. So he immediately wanted to get accustomed to suffering: now by holding for five minutes a heavy Lexicon in his outstretched hand, then by whipping his bare back with a rope so severely that tears sprang to his eyes. Then again, the idea that death was awaiting him at any moment overcame him to such an extent that he could not understand how people had hitherto failed to enjoy every single minute of the present without thinking at all of death and of the future. He suddenly gave up his lessons, and, for three days, did nothing but lie on the bed, reading romances and eating gingerbread with honey.

One more factor that exercised a profound unconscious influence upon his character (especially upon his shyness on the one side, and his egotistic self-assertiveness on the other) was his unattractive exterior. "I fancied," he writes in *Childhood*, "that there was no happiness on earth for a person with such a wide nose, such thick lips, and such small gray eyes as I had; I besought God to work a miracle, to turn me into beauty, and all I had in the present, or might have in the future, I would give in exchange for

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a handsome face." And in *Boyhood* he says again: "I was modest by nature, but my modesty was further increased by my own ugliness. And I am sure that nothing has such a decisive influence upon a man's course as his personal appearance, and not so much his appearance as his belief in its attractiveness or unattractiveness. I was too egotistical to become accustomed to my position, and consoled myself, like the fox, by assuring myself that the grapes were still green; that is to say, I endeavoured to despise all the pleasures derived from the pleasing exterior which Volodya [his would-be brother]¹ enjoyed in my eyes, and which I envied with all my soul, and I strained every nerve of my mind and imagination to find solace in proud solitude."

Together with all this there probably awakened in him, now and then, some slumbering irrational depths and inclinations the quality of which was so dangerous that it could be checked only by a strong and deliberate self-control. This passage, taken from *Boyhood*, throws some light upon the nature of those depths: "In recalling my boyhood, I very clearly appreciate

¹ The external data and names in Tolstoy's autobiographic *Childhood*, *Boyhood*, and *Youth* are not always strictly reliable (for instance, those about his father and mother), yet the main thing is that the psychological data in it are invariably true and reliable in so far as Tolstoy himself is concerned.

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the importance of the most frightful crime, committed without object or intent to injure, but from curiosity, to meet an unconscious need for activity. There are moments when the future presents itself to a man in such sombre colours, that he dreads to fix his mental gaze upon it, entirely represses the action of his mind, and endeavours to convince himself that the future will not be, and that the past has not been. At such moments, when thought does not sit in judgment before every decision of the will, and the fleshly instincts remain the sole spring of life, I can understand how a child is especially inclined to set and light a fire under the very house in which his brothers, his father, and his mother, whom he tenderly loves, are sleeping, without the slightest hesitation or fear, and with a smile of curiosity. Under the influence of this temporary absence of reflection, approaching aberration of mind, a peasant lad of seventeen, contemplating the freshly sharpened edge of an axe, beside the bench on which sleeps his ancient father, face downwards, suddenly flourishes the axe, and gazes with stupid curiosity at the blood, as it drips from the severed neck on the bench: under the influence of the same absence of reflection and instinctive curiosity, a man experiences a certain enjoyment in pausing

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upon the brink of a precipice, and thinking, 'What if I should throw myself down there?' Or, placing a loaded pistol to his forehead, he thinks, 'What if I pull the trigger?' Or he gazes upon some person for whom society universally cherishes a peculiar respect, and thinks, 'What if I were to go up to him, take him by the nose, and say: Come, my dear fellow, shall we go?' "

III

From these early reminiscences, avowals, and facts one could derive practically the entire character of the grown-up Tolstoy. They indicate most of those features which later on were to form his strange and contradictory personality. His spontaneous joy in existence, his brooding moral and didactic inclination, his hatred of authority, his impracticable and dogmatic idealism, his love of country and country-people, his continuous fear of the irrational "fleshly instincts"—they all go as far back as his early youth.

As a boy he left Yasnaya Polyana, first for Moscow and then for Kazan, where he entered the University. On leaving the University as a failure (1849) he settled down on his estate

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and began to simplify his life. After a short, not altogether fortunate stay in the village (recorded in *A Squire's Morning*), he joined his brother Nicholas, at that time an officer among the Caucasian Cossacks. There he served for a couple of years, taking part in many romantic expeditions against the half-savage hostile tribes in the mountains.

This sojourn was of considerable importance for Tolstoy's further life. In particular, his innate enthusiasm for nature was stimulated by the Caucasian mountains, which were for him a revelation of beauty. He himself depicts (in *The Cossacks*) his first acquaintance with their magic :—

“ In the rapid motion of the vehicle over the even road, the mountains seemed to be running along the horizon, gleaming in the rising sun with their rosy summits. At first the mountains only surprised Olenin [*i.e.*, Tolstoy], but later they gave him pleasure. And later, as he gazed longer at this chain of snow-capped mountains, which were not connected with other black mountains, but rose directly from the steppe, he began by degrees to understand their full beauty, and to ‘feel’ the mountains.

“ From that moment, everything he saw,

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everything he thought, everything he felt, assumed for him a new, severely majestic character, that of the mountains. All the Moscow reminiscences, his shame and remorse, all the trite dreams of the Caucasus, everything disappeared, and never returned again. 'Now it has begun,' a solemn voice said to him. 'And the road and the distant line of the Terek, and the villages, and the people, all that appeared to him no longer a trifling matter.

"He looked at the sky, and he thought of the mountains. He looked at himself, and at Vanyusha [his servant]—and again the mountains. There, two Cossacks rode by, and their muskets in cases evenly vibrated on their backs, and their horses intermingled their chestnut and gray legs,—and the mountains. Beyond the Terek was seen the smoke in a native village,—and the mountains.'

"The sun rose and glistened on the Terek beyond the reeds,—and the mountains. From the Cossack village came a native cart, and women, beautiful young women, walked,—and the mountains. 'Abreks [hostile mountaineers] race through the steppes, and I am travelling, and fear them not: I have a gun, and strength, and youth,—and the mountains.' "

This intimate abandonment to Nature, so

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typical of Tolstoy, received a further impetus from the primitive Cossacks. Carousing, hunting and fighting in their company, he discovered in these somewhat rough children of Nature that very fascination of wholeness which he found later in the patriarchal Russian peasants, and also in the Russian soldiers among whom he fought during the Crimean campaign.

It was in the Caucasus that he wrote his first work, *Childhood* (published in 1852), perhaps the most charming description of a child's mentality in all literature. It is a work so simple, obvious and natural that at the first glance it seems as if any one could have written it. Tolstoy describes there nothing but the everyday surroundings, impressions and occupations of a small boy. There is no plot in it, no architecture proper, no connected narrative, but only a collection of casual episodes and characters. "The Tutor Karl Ivanytch," "Mamma," "Papa," "Lessons," "Preparations for the Hunt," "The Hunt," "Games,"—these are the titles of some of the chapters. It is a book of *Kleinmalerei*, in short, a book of trifles. But all these trifles take from Tolstoy's hand a magic which makes them more interesting and more alive than are hundreds of romantic plots invented by other authors.

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Tolstoy's great contemporary, Dostoevsky, made with his characters a kind of chemical experiments—by putting them into utterly abnormal situations and surroundings—in order to penetrate to their human essence through their own inner agonies and terrors. But while Dostoevsky sees the man only from within and is at his best when conjuring up the naked human soul from the depths of its psychological pandemonium, Tolstoy is capable of showing us the whole essence of a man by describing how he smiles, eats, looks, walks, or moves his fingers. Dostoevsky first “guesses” and then sees; Tolstoy sees and observes first and then guesses with his intuition. He takes two or three external accessories, and the whole portrait is there—alive, even more alive than in reality. He seems to avoid plots on purpose—probably realising that his imagination is too weak for intricate and “clever” inventions. But he makes up for this weakness by the incredible precision of his observation and the vigour of his intuition, owing to which he reveals to us an inexhaustible store of content and significance under the most ordinary external aspects of life and man.

Tolstoy wrote *Childhood* in his early twenties, yet we can easily feel even in this comparatively

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short masterpiece all the force of his budding genius. He sent the manuscript to *Sovremenik* (*The Contemporary*), edited at that time by the poet Nekrasov. The result was that Tolstoy was soon hailed as a rising power in Russian letters. Much was expected of him, and he fully justified these expectations by his subsequent writings.

Works directly connected with Tolstoy's stay in the Caucasus are his stories, *The Raid* (1852), *The Wood-Felling* (1855), and, in particular, *The Cossacks* (1862)—one of the freshest things he ever wrote. Later, he returned to Caucasian motives in *A Prisoner in the Caucasus* (1872), and in *Hadji Murad*, which was written mostly in 1901 and published after his death.

After the Crimean Campaign, in which he took part as a soldier and as a writer (his magnificent Sebastopol Sketches appeared in 1854-55), he left the army and led, for a while, a somewhat irregular life in the Russian capital. His literary fame gave him access to the entire *Sovremenik*-circle, where he distinguished himself by violent discussions and repeated quarrels. He wrangled especially with Turgevniev, to whom his attitude was and remained enigmatic—continually vacillating between friendship and hatred, between spite and secret admiration.

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The involuntary modesty of the "ugly" Tolstoy found now its sudden and natural compensation in a kind of intolerant egotism, and in such an exclusive insistence on his own opinions that he contradicted everybody and everything, often merely for the sake of contradiction.

"Whatever judgment might have been passed and the greater the authority of his interlocutor, the more he would insist on asserting an opposite view and in retorting sharply. Watching how he listened to his interlocutor, how he scrutinised him, how sarcastically he screwed up his lips, one would have thought he was thinking not so much how to answer a question as how to express an opinion which should be a puzzle and surprise to the questioner. In discussions he pushed his argument to the furthest extreme."

Thus the writer, D. Grigorovitch, who also was at that time on the staff of the *Sovremenik*. And in his old age Tolstoy himself acknowledged in a letter to P. Biryukov : "A trait of my character, it may be good or ill, but it is one which was always peculiar to me, is that in spite of myself I always used to resist epidemic influences . . . I had a hatred of the general tendency."

Apart from his obdurate self-will and intellectual pride, he often displayed in those years

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the unrestrained nature of a gambler who invariably goes to the end in whatever he does, feels, or thinks, quite regardless of consequences. So when intending to marry Valerie Arseniev—his first more or less serious love—he confessed in a letter (Nov. 28th, 1856) straightway : “ I stake everything on one throw. If I do not find complete happiness, then I shall ruin everything, my talent, my heart ; I shall become a drunkard, a gambler ; I shall steal, if I have not the courage to cut my throat. . . . I did not joke when I said that, if my wife were to make a cushion as a surprise for me or some trifle of the kind, and she were to do it without my knowledge, I should run away from her next day to the end of the world, and we should become strangers to each other. I can’t help it, I am like that and I don’t conceal it, nor exaggerate it. Think well, can you love such a monster ? ”

More successful in literature than in love, Tolstoy excelled about that time in several new stories : the boisterous *Two Hussars* (1856), *The Snow Storm* (1856), *Notes of a Billiard Marker* (1856), and *Youth* (1857). In 1859, and again in 1860, he travelled abroad, where he met, amongst others, the famous educationalist Froebel, the socialist Proudhon, the German author of peasant stories and novels—Auerbach, and the

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Russian revolutionary, Alexander Herzen. During his first journey he saw in France an execution in all its horror, and on his second trip he was present at the death of his brother Nicholas, in Hyeres: two events that impressed him profoundly. He also witnessed the artificiality, cant and hypocrisy of Western "progress," personal acquaintance with which was hardly calculated to engender in his heart a respect for Europe and Civilisation.

During that period he wrote *Albert* (1857), *Luzern* (1857), the wonderful psychological study *Family Happiness* (1859), and the tragic serf-story *Polikushka* (at Brussels in 1860). Meanwhile he organised a peasant-school on his estate, where he himself taught the children (in 1859, and especially in the winter of 1861-62), spending weeks and months on experiments in principles directed against the "general tendency" in education. Later he started for this purpose a magazine, *Yasnaya Polyana*, in which he explained his own educational views, largely influenced by Rousseau; he even constructed a model A-B-C book (1872) for children.

In spite of his growing literary fame, he seemed to be more and more dissatisfied with mere literature and to seek for something else,

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for something more. The shaping of life, not in fiction but in reality, was gradually becoming one of his ruling tendencies, and perhaps temptations. But having married (1862) very happily, he quieted down for a few years and wrote, in his idyllic retreat Yasnaya Polyana, the two greatest prose-works of the nineteenth century, *War and Peace* (1864-69) and *Anna Karenina* (1875-77).

He was now justly considered Russia's greatest genius. Yet satiated with all the glory a modern writer can dream of, he eventually rejected, with proud humility, his literary honours, and began to muse about "last things."

IV

It was perhaps Tolstoy's apparently sudden rupture with his "useless" artistic creation and former "parasitic" life—a rupture first described in *Confession* (1879)—that fixed on him the attention of the world at large. The world made a kind of sensation of his so-called conversion. But for Tolstoy himself this step was only a stage in a painful and continuously ripening inner conflict which at last had to find some solution or other.

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Turgenev, who visited the converted Tolstoy in 1880, records his impressions in the following letter: "It is an unpardonable sin that Leo Tolstoy has stopped writing. . . . Such an artist, such first-class talent, we have never had, nor now have among us. I, for instance, am considered an artist, but what am I worth compared to him! In contemporary European literature he has no equal. Whatever he takes up, it all becomes alive under his pen. And how wide the sphere of his creative power—it is simply amazing! But what is one to do with him? He has plunged headlong into another sphere: has surrounded himself with Bibles and Gospels in nearly all languages, and has written a whole heap of papers. He has a trunk full of these mystical ethics and various pseudo-interpretations. He read me some of it which I simply do not understand. . . . I told him, 'That was not the real thing'; but he replied, 'It is just the real thing . . . Very probably he will give nothing more to literature, or if he reappears it will be with that trunk . . .'"

Turgenev was partly right. Tolstoy soon began to pour out moralistic pamphlets one after another. A year after *Confession*, he finished his *Criticism of Dogmatic Theology* (printed

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only in 1891) in which he attacked the official Christian teaching. This attack he completed with *What I Believe* (1884), where he systematised his own personal conception of Christ's message. He repeated and partly enlarged, or modified the same views in *What Then Must We Do?* (1886), *On Life* (1887), *The Kingdom of God is Within You* (1893), *What is Art?* (1898), *What is Religion* (1902), *What is to be done?* (1906), and many other pamphlets or essays. His aesthetic and his moral sense became definitely divorced. He began to deny his own art for moral reasons. At last he considered all aesthetic pleasure as of lower order. "The highest aesthetic enjoyment never gives us complete satisfaction. One wants all the time something more. One can be fully satisfied only by what is morally good," we read in his diary of 1896.

Nevertheless the artist in Tolstoy was not entirely stifled after his conversion, as Turgeniev had feared. Now and then his literary genius claimed its rights, and in spite of the "purpose" which the stern moralist invariably tried to impose upon it, Tolstoy gave out a few more works of true art: *The Death of Ivan Ilyitch* (1886), the gloomy peasant drama—*Power of Darkness* (1886), the farcical comedy, *Fruits of*

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Culture (1889), the story, *Master and Man* (1895), and the novel, *Resurrection* (1899). But what Tolstoy was now mainly concerned about was preaching to the world that truth which he thought he had discovered, or rediscovered; in the message of Christ.

In the name of this truth he began to denounce and reject everything that did not agree with it, and his anathemas sounded—in their drastic frankness—to many people like revelations. Tolstoy soon became a moral world-power with the right to say everything. He himself was at times so conscious of his mission that in 1899 he wrote in his diary: “Now I am an ordinary man and animal, and now I am the messenger of God. I am all the time the same man, but now I am the public and now the judge himself with the chain, fulfilling the highest responsibilities. One must put on the chain more often. . . .” He made, in fact, ample use of the prerogatives of a judge. So much so that at last the eyes of the best Europeans were fixed on Yasnaya Polyana in the expectation of a real “new word”—*ex oriente*.

Yet, in spite of the sincerity of Tolstoy's indictments and daring criticisms, the real “new word” failed to come. Even those who did not acknowledge this openly, must have felt that

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there was some curious flaw in Tolstoy's teaching—quite apart from occasional (and not too important) external contradictions between his principles and his own life. There was something in Tolstoy's voice that did not sound convincing—even when he affirmed most categorically that he himself had found complete inner peace and happiness in the teaching he was offering to the world. It often seemed that in trying so vehemently to convince others he perhaps wanted to convince above all himself—convince *fully* and definitely.

But if this be so, then Tolstoy's figure becomes at once more interesting and more tragic than it would be if he were only a "holy man of God" without any disturbing and carefully guarded secret. So tragic, indeed, that by this very fact he cannot be examined on the plane of our petty sincerity and insincerity, but on a plane that is beyond and above it.

There are in effect many proofs that beneath Tolstoy's preaching of true life, of peace and happiness, there was the same lacerated, restless, and painfully seeking soul after his conversion as before it. It was the "converted" Tolstoy, blessed with fame, prosperity and children, who in his old age confessed to Gorky: "The Kaliph Abdurahman had during his

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life fourteen happy days, but I am sure I have not had so many. And this is because I have never lived—I cannot live—for myself, for my own self; I live for show, for people.”

Was it not the same Tolstoy who already in 1897 definitely decided to retire from the world—not because he had found inner peace but because he *wished* to find it? “Just as Hindoos nearing sixty retire into the woods, and as old religious men seek to devote their last years to God and not to jokes, puns, gossip, or tennis, so for me, entering my seventieth year, the desire which absorbs my whole soul is for tranquillity, for solitude, and, *if not for entire harmony*,¹ at least to avoid crying discord between my life and my beliefs and conscience.”

In his glory and world-fame he felt perhaps more unhappy than ever. And more lonely too, in spite of his numerous family; in spite of countless admiring visitors from all parts of our globe. Although there were several attempts to form Tolstoyan colonies in various countries, nothing except failures, dissensions and squabbles came out of them, for human nature always proved stronger in the end than Tolstoy's doctrines. He himself did everything he could

¹The italics in this passage, taken from the draft of a letter which Tolstoy then intended leaving for his wife, are mine.

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to live up to his own Christian convictions, and yet on March 5th, 1901, he was solemnly excommunicated by the Holy Synod from the Russian Church as a dangerous heretic and Anti-Christian. Apart from all this, he was not fortunate enough to find proper hearing in his own family. His wife—who was far from being an inferior or a commonplace woman—became even one of his opponents, while some of his sons took up professions or occupations that were in glaring contradiction with his own teaching.

It was probably these and similar facts that made him complain in one of his intimate avowals: "The disagreement of people is exceeding painful, especially so because a man thinks of himself that he has not his own opinion but only holds to the truth; and suddenly it turns out that the truth is not only not understood, but that it even offends people, and drives them away from him. There is something wrong here, I am to blame for something, I have in some way offended truth. This is terrible, and it torments me." And what terrible isolation breathe these lines which he wrote casually on a scrap of paper in 1900—when he was already seventy-two: "Dull, miserable state the whole day. Towards evening this mood

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passed into tenderness—a desire for fondness, for love, longed as children do to press up to a loving, pitying creature and to weep with emotion and to be comforted. But what creature is there to whom I could come close like that? I go over all the people I have loved; not one is suitable to whom I can come close. If I could be little and snuggle up to my mother as I imagine her to myself! Yes, yes; mother whom I called to when I could not speak, yes, she, my highest imagination of pure love,—not cold, divine love, but earthly, warm, motherly. It is to that that my battered, weary soul is drawn.”

What is all the pomp of fame in the face of such loneliness—loneliness with people, with truth, with God, with oneself? It is certain that its ultimate cause must be sought not so much in the external world as in the peculiar constitution of Tolstoy’s own mentality.

CHAPTER II
THE DOUBLE SINCERITY

II

THE DOUBLE SINCERITY

I

THERE is a current opinion that Tolstoy's life is divided into two entirely different parts—the period before and that after his conversion. Externally this seems to be so, especially since the apparent gulf between them has been widened by Tolstoy's own denunciation of his “ungodly” youth and early manhood. In spite of all this, a careful perusal of Tolstoy's *entire* literary work leads to another conclusion: it shows that inwardly there was neither a definite nor an unlooked-for rupture between the “godly” and the “ungodly” halves of Tolstoy's personality. What actually took place was only a change of proportion between the antithetic elements of his soul.

Every attentive reader of Tolstoy could point out at least some of these contradictory features which are more or less apparent in his writings. It is not difficult to detect there the unusual

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breadth of his intuition, and parallel with it, the dogmatic narrowness of his thought; the dynamic quality of his "fleshly instincts," and a rather static character of his dry asceticism; his enthusiasm for love and goodness, and his pitiless cruelty towards so many of his own characters; his untiring preaching of selflessness, and his unconscious ego-centricism, which makes his own self the actual focus of nearly all his writings, and urges him to seek—even in his universal love—first of all his personal salvation. One could mention scores of other contradictions. And most of them can be reduced to that fundamental duality of his nature which we notice even in his first attempts at a self-analysis in *Childhood*, *Boyhood*, and *Youth*: the duality between the innate spontaneity of his emotions and instincts, and the equally innate coldness of his simultaneous self-observation.

Thus, in describing his first departure from home as an event full of despair, he says: "I was choking with tears, and something oppressed my throat so that I was afraid I should stifle. As we entered the highway, we saw a white handkerchief which some one was waving from the balcony. I began to wave mine, and this movement calmed me somewhat. I continued to cry, and *the thought that my tears proved my*

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sensitiveness afforded me pleasure and consolation."¹ Or listen to the description of his first great sorrow: "Before and after the burial, I never ceased to weep, and was sad; but it puts me to shame to recall that sadness, because a feeling of self-love was always mingled with it; at one time the desire to show that I was more sorry than anybody else; again, solicitude as to the impression which I was producing upon others; at another time, an aimless curiosity which caused me to make observations upon Mimi's cap and the faces of those present. I despised myself because the feeling I experienced was not exclusively one of sorrow, and I tried to conceal all others; for this reason my regret was insincere and unnatural. Moreover, I experienced a sort of pleasure in knowing that I was unhappy. I tried to arouse my consciousness of unhappiness, and this egotistical feeling, more than all the rest, stifled genuine grief within me."

Real, profound grief and the scrutiny of a self-conscious observer are here parallel, and this distressing parallelism increased in Tolstoy with years. However spontaneous his feelings, the cold blade of analysis was sure to be there to dissect, to label, to kill them. "I always realised

¹*Italics are mine.*

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myself, was always conscious of myself, and this spoilt my joy of life," Tolstoy acknowledges in his autobiographical reminiscences.

The richer and fuller the emotions, the more painful may become this simultaneous interference of self-analysis; for it leads to involuntary duplicity on the one side, and to lacerating suspicions of oneself on the other. ("I despised myself because the feeling I experienced was not exclusively one of sorrow, and I tried to conceal all others; for this reason my regret was insincere and unnatural.") If a strife between such contradictory feelings becomes habitual and organic, it may easily produce an exaggerated self-disgust, followed by violent reactions. A mental reaction against such aversion to oneself usually consists of firm resolutions to act differently, to improve. And if the prospective task seems particularly arduous, one tries to alleviate its complexity by adopting definite rules and principles according to which to act. These decisions are often accompanied by genuine repentance on account of one's "badness."

Yet the repentance itself (especially violent repentance) may give a moral satisfaction—derived from the pleasant feeling that, after all, one is not as bad as all this. It is known that

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a grievous action is often tempting not in itself, but by the pleasant foretaste of remorse and improvement. So much so, that the "darker" one's past or present, the greater may be the joy obtained from the mere prospect of moral regeneration.

"The principal feeling was disgust at myself and remorse," confesses Tolstoy in *Youth*, "but a remorse so mingled with hope of bliss that there was nothing sorrowful about it. It seemed to me so easy and natural to tear myself away from all the past, to reconstruct, to forget everything which had been, and to begin my life with all its relations quite anew, that the past neither weighed upon nor fettered me. I even took pleasure in my repugnance to the past, and began to see it in more sombre colours than it had possessed. The blacker was the circle of memories of the past, the purer and brighter did the pure, bright point of the present and the rainbow hues of the future stand out in relief against it. The voice of remorse, and the passionate desire for perfection, was the chief new spiritual sentiment at that epoch of my development."

This moral repugnance to the past, with its concomitants—violent self-accusations or even public confessions on the one side, and a

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“passionate desire for perfection” on the other—is one of the main springs of such militant moralists as Tolstoy. But in his case the process was aggravated by the fact that in his younger days he had to wrestle with such strong contradictions and passions that “absence of reflection” might actually have become his greatest danger: continuous inner control was—in a certain sense—his necessity, even his self-preservative measure. And the more deliberate this self-analysis, the more rational became Tolstoy’s moral consciousness, until the gulf between it and his irrational life-instinct was so wide that no philosophy could bridge it.

“From all this heavy moral toil I brought away nothing except a quickness of mind which weakened the force of my will, and a habit of constant moral analysis, which destroyed freshness of feeling¹ and clearness of judgment,” he says in *Boyhood*. “My tendency to abstract meditation developed the perceptive faculties in me to such an unnatural extent,

¹This trait of Tolstoy developed to such an extent that even at the most responsible and fateful moment of his life—in the night of his secret flight from his family and house (in October, 1910) he could not help observing and even *writing down* the minutest trifles of the flight: “I tremble at the thought that she (his wife) will hear. . . . It is night, pitch dark. I get off the path of the lodge, fall into the bushes, get scratched, knock against trees, fall down, lose my cap, cannot find it; with difficulty make my way out, go home, take a cap, and with a lantern make my way to the stable,” etc., etc.

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that frequently, when I began to think of the simplest sort of thing, I fell into an inextricable circle of analysis of my thoughts, and no longer considered the question which had occupied me, but thought of what I was thinking about. . . . Nevertheless, the philosophical discoveries which I made were extremely flattering to my self-conceit. I often fancied myself a great man, who was discovering new truths for the benefit of mankind, and I gazed upon other mortals with a proud consciousness of my worth; but, strange to say, when I came in contact with these mortals, I was shy in the presence of every one of them, and the higher I rated myself in my own opinion, the less capable I was of displaying my consciousness of my own merit, to others, and I could not even accustom myself not to feel ashamed of my every word and movement, however simple."

II

We see from these references that the elements of the future introspective doctrinaire and reformer were beginning to develop already in Tolstoy's early youth. But together with them there soon developed also the future great artist

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with all his spontaneity and intuitive joy in the material universe. For, in spite of his analysis, he was capable of enjoying the beauty of life and nature, of the human body, of animals and things, with the intense joy of a child or a primitive Pagan. This curious combination of self-conscious introspection and of emotional *largesse* we find side by side in most of his works of art; particularly in those he wrote before his conversion. Yet, his artistic tact is so great that he rarely allows them to clash. Interlacing them skilfully, he usually sustains that balance between them which makes his very philosophy and his moral "purpose" a vital part of the whole.

We find splendid illustrations of the spontaneity of his impressions and feelings in his autobiographical story, *The Cossacks*. Take, for instance, the passage describing how the young Olenin (*i.e.*, Tolstoy) on a hunt crawled under a bush in the thicket and lay down near a stag's lair. "He examined the dark foliage all around him, the damp place, the dung of the previous day, the imprint of the stag's knees, a clump of black earth which the stag had kicked up, and his own tracks of the day before. He felt cool and comfortable; he thought of nothing, wished for nothing. And suddenly he was overcome by such a strange feeling of causeless

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happiness and love for everything that, following an old boyish habit, he began to cross himself and to thank somebody for something. It suddenly passed through his mind with extraordinary clearness that he, Dmitri Olenin, a being apart from all other beings, was sitting all alone, God knew where, in the very spot where there used to live a stag, a beautiful old stag which, perhaps, had never before seen a man, and in a place where, perhaps, no one had been sitting before, or thinking about the same matter.

“ ‘I am sitting here, and all about me are young and old trees, and one of these is festooned with wild grape vines; near me pheasants are fluttering, driving each other from their hiding-places, and probably scenting their dead brothers.’ He put his fingers on his pheasants, examined them, and wiped his hand, which was stained by their warm blood, against his mantle. ‘The jackals are probably scenting them, and with dissatisfied faces turning away in the opposite direction. The gnats fly all around me, passing by leaves that appear to them like many huge islands, and they hover in the air and buzz: one, two, three, four, one hundred, one thousand, a million gnats, and all of them buzz something, for some reason, all about me, and every one of

them is just such a Dmitri Olenin, apart from all the rest as I am.' He had a clear idea of what the gnats were thinking and buzzing. 'Here, boys! Here is one whom we can eat'; they buzzed and clung to him. And it became clear to him that he was not at all a Russian nobleman, a member of Moscow society, a friend and relative of this or that person, but simply just such a gnat, or pheasant, or stag, as those that now were living all around him. 'I shall live and die, just like them, like Uncle Eroshka.' And he is telling the truth: 'Only grass will grow up!'

"'And what of it if the grass will grow up,' he continued his thought. 'Still I must live; I must be happy because I wish for this—happiness. It matters not what I am: such an animal as the rest, over which the grass will grow, and nothing else, or a frame into which a part of the One God has been encased,—I must still live the best way possible. But how must I live in order to be happy, and why have I not been happy before?' And he began to recall his former life, and he was disgusted with himself. He represented himself as an exacting egoist, whereas in reality he needed very little for himself. And he kept gazing about him: at the foliage checkered by the sunlight, at the

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declining sun, and at the clear heaven, and he felt as happy as before."

" 'Why am I happy, and why have I lived before?' he thought. 'How exacting I used to be! How I concocted and caused nothing but shame and woe for myself!' And suddenly it seemed that a new world was open to him. 'Happiness is this,' he said to himself: 'happiness consists in living for others. This is clear. The desire for happiness is inborn in man; consequently it is legitimate. In attempting to satisfy it in an egoistical manner, that is, by seeking wealth, glory, comforts of life, and love, the circumstances may so arrange themselves that it is impossible to satisfy these desires. Consequently these desires are illegitimate, but the need of happiness is not illegitimate. Now, what desires are these that can always be satisfied, in spite of external conditions? What desires? Love, self-sacrifice!'

"He was so rejoiced and excited when he discovered this truth which seemed to be new, that he leaped up and impatiently began to look around for some one to sacrifice himself for, to do good to, and to love. 'I do not need anything for myself,' he proceeded in his thought, 'then why should I not live for others?'

In this important passage we see once more

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that in the midst of his pantheistic expansion and intimacy with Nature, he "began to recall his former life and was disgusted with himself." Olenin identified himself so intensely with the reality around him, even with the biting gnats, that out of mere fullness and intensity of this feeling he wished to merge, to dissolve, in all life. But while his exuberant soul revelled in the elemental pantheistic love for others, his rational Ego began not only to reason about it, but even to weigh the personal advantages and disadvantages of such selfless love. And what on the plane of instincts was an act of strength becomes an act of weakness on the plane of reason. Olenin approves of selflessness because this is less painful and therefore more profitable than egoism. His reason thus makes his very selflessness rather selfish.

However intense and overflowing Tolstoy's impulses might have been, interference on the part of reason was never absent in him. And its control even increased at the moments when he was swayed by negative impulses and emotions. As his early diaries prove, his impetuous nature often carried him too far in his passions, pride, jealousy, love of wine and women ; but his introspective double was also on the spot—observing, analysing, noting down, and at last reacting with

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violent reproaches and rules for moral regeneration: at first for the regeneration of Tolstoy himself, and afterwards also of humanity at large.

“Two principal passions which I have noted in myself are a passion for play and vanity; which latter is the more dangerous in that it assumes a countless multitude of different forms, such as a desire to show off, want of reflection, absence of mind, and so on,” he writes in 1851 (in *Yasnaya Polyana*). And after pages of self-accusations on account of sloth, weakness, lying, ineradicable voluptuousness, and other defects, we read: “Yesterday could not forbear signalling to some one in a pink dress who looked comely from a distance. Opened the back door, and she entered. Could not even see her; all seemed foul and repellent, and I actually hated her.”

“I cannot think of those years without horror, loathing and heartache,” Tolstoy exclaimed much later (in *Confession*) on account of his early manhood. “I killed men in war and challenged them to duels in order to kill them; I lost at cards, consumed the labour of the peasants, sentenced them to punishments, lived loosely, and deceived people. Lying, robbery, adultery of all kinds, drunkenness, violence, murder—

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there was no crime I did not commit, and people approved of my conduct, and my contemporaries considered and consider me to be a comparatively moral man."

One of the main origins of the feeling of guilt is precisely awareness of one's instincts and emotions, which in itself is the first step of moral introspection and also moral valuation. As long as the instincts keep of themselves to certain forms of life dictated by the racial self-preservation (as is the case in primitive patriarchal communities) there is no need for personal valuations. But, sooner or later, individual consciousness is doomed to develop, and this for a long period, at its own risk; that is, at the price of separation, inner contradiction, division, and self-division. And the more threatening the anarchy of instincts during this process, the more indispensable become such values which could keep them together. It is here that an individual search for a "meaning of life" becomes imperative—a meaning which would impose a focus upon the disintegrating self. And the search for such a focus was another reason of Tolstoy's moral self-lacerations and resolutions.

"Hope is bad for the happy man and good for the unhappy," he wrote in his diary at

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the age of eighteen, when in Kazan. "Some change in my mode of life must result; yet that change must not come of an external circumstance—rather of a movement of spirit; wherefore I keep finding myself confronted with the question, 'What is the aim of man's life?' And, no matter what result my reflections reach, no matter what I take to be life's course, I invariably arrive at the conclusion that the purpose of our human existence is to afford a maximum of help towards the universal development of everything that exists. So I, too, shall be safe in taking for the aim of my existence a conscious striving for the universal development of everything existent. I should be the unhappiest of mortals if I could not find a purpose for my life, and a purpose at once universal and useful—useful because development will enable my immortal soul to pass naturally into an existence that will be at once superior and akin to this one. Wherefore, henceforth all my life must be a constant, active striving for that one purpose."

He attempted to strive for this purpose in a very deliberate and methodical way, adopted by him already in his boyhood, by means of self-imposed moral rules and principles which he tried to fulfil to the letter. Especially from

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his student years onwards we can trace in him an almost German manner of arranging all his life beforehand—according to strictly fixed recipes and ideas. His diaries of those days are interspersed with rules, and in his “passionate desire for perfection” he seemed to derive a special pleasure from framing new ones.

“Also the fact that I find it necessary to determine my occupation beforehand renders a diary additionally indispensable,” he argues with himself in 1850. “Indeed, I should like to acquire a habit of predetermining my form of life not merely for a day, but for a year, several years, the whole of the rest of my existence. This, however, will be too difficult for me, almost impossible. Nevertheless, I will make the attempt—at first for a day in advance, then for two. In fact, as many days as I may remain loyal to my resolutions, for so many days will I plan beforehand.”

And then there follow minute recipes for his moral conduct, for society, and even a few rules for card-playing; all of them thorough, elaborate, very reasonable and clear. One also feels in every line a firm intention to keep to them. “Yesterday the day went well enough,” he writes on June 9th, 1850, “for almost everything in it was carried out. With one point

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only I am feeling dissatisfied, and that point is the fact that I cannot overcome my sensuality, and the less so in that it is a passion which has now become in me a habit. However, my resolutions for two days having been carried out, I will make plans for a similar period."

But only a few months later (December 29th) he seems to be again much less firm about his decisions. He accuses himself of leading the life of a brute, a life practically to no purpose. "I have abandoned," he says, "nearly all my pursuits, and am feeling out of spirits. Tomorrow I must rise early, and, until two o'clock, neither receive any one nor go out for a drive. . . . Also, I must take thought at my leisure concerning my future conduct in any new situation. In the morning will work at the table, read, and either play the piano or write something on music; while in the evening I will frame further rules, and visit the tziganes."¹

¹Many fashionable restaurants in Moscow, Petrograd and other big towns kept special choirs of tziganes, i.e., pretty gipsy-girls who usually were also prostitutes.

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III

It is remarkable that the Tolstoy of those days could put together such incongruities as the intention to frame further moral rules, and visit the tziganes. Yet this is but a chance illustration of his personality divided between irrational "fleshly" impulses (of the positive and negative kinds) and the rational "meaning of life" with its introspective quest and query. It was this division that led Tolstoy to a growing preoccupation with his own ego, with his own rules and truths, making him intolerant of everything that threatened to destroy that dogmatic firmness of conviction which was so essential for him. ("I confess," he wrote in those years, "that one of the chief aspirations of my life has always been to become firmly and immutably convinced of things.") In his innocent, often quite unconscious egotism, he measured everything with his own opinions, needs and desires. Sometimes he seemed not even to comprehend how any one could contradict him or hold ideas different from his own. Eventually he became so convinced that the truth of Tolstoy ought to be the self-evident truth of all the world that this certainly lent a peculiar childish

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fascination to most of his arguments, even when—in themselves—they were unacceptable.

This dogmatic firmness always grows in the same proportion as the danger on the part of his irrational self. In other words, the moralist in Tolstoy keeps continual watch over Tolstoy, the man and the artist. Take, for example, *War and Peace*—his fullest and most vital work. There are countless masses in it, and more than a hundred individual characters: all of them merged in a great whole, a whole whose elemental sway is beyond good and evil, because it is grander and profounder than any petty moralising; the sense of life is here in life itself, and not in doctrines about it. And yet, neither Prince Andrey Bolkonsky nor Pierre Bezoukhov (Tolstoy's two doubles) can accept life without finding first its moral justification. This search is later so intensified in Levin (*Anna Karenina*) that Tolstoy's *Confession*, which came only a few years after, is not a surprise, but a conclusion—a necessary logical complement to both Pierre and Levin.

Nevertheless, Tolstoy's best and most beautiful pages are those in which he keeps in check his moralising tendency and simply renders all the breadth and wealth of life as he feels it vibrating and streaming through his own soul. And,

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curiously enough, from the beginning he is at his best in the description of full-blooded characters teeming with that "spontaneity of egotism" which we find, say, in the old Uncle Eroshka (*The Cossacks*), with his wild wisdom of Nature. Although morally condemning war, Tolstoy often revels in the vigour and élan of the war scenes, and depicts them with that instinctive admiration with which he described the youthful fascination of Natasha, the seductive physical beauty of Anna Karenina, or—long after his conversion—the savage pride and recklessness of the Caucasian rebel, Hadji Murat. Moreover, in spite of his intellectual worship of selflessness, he, in the character of the young Olenin in *The Cossack*, is not afraid of admitting eventually that "self-renunciation is nonsense, wild rambling. It is nothing but pride, a refuge from a well-deserved misfortune, a salvation from envying another's happiness. To live for others, to do good! Wherefore? When my soul is filled with the one love of myself, and with the one desire to love her [the Cossack girl, Marianka] and live with her, to live her life. I now wish happiness, not for others, not for Lukashka [her *fiancé*]. Now I do not love others. Formerly I should have said that this is bad. I should have tormented myself with

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the questions, 'What will become of her, of me, of Lukashka?' Now it is all the same to me. I live not in myself, but there is something stronger that guides me. I suffer; but formerly I was dead, and now I live."

With the same flash of self-revelation, Tolstoy condemns Sonia in *War and Peace* just for her exaggerated devotion and self-sacrifice. "To him that hath shall be given, and from him that hath not shall be taken even that that he hath, do you remember? She is that hath not; why, I don't know, perhaps she has no egoism. . . . She is a *barren flower*, you know, like what one finds among the strawberry flowers."

Thus the first Tolstoy—he who is more in love with life than with selflessness as such.¹ It is the sincerity of his life-instinct that goes against the sincerity of his principles, and he cannot help it. Hence it is wrong to accuse Tolstoy of hypocrisy because of the many contradictions one finds in his works and his life. Had he been a hypocrite, his inner dilemma

¹ Tolstoy himself had moments of almost cynical egoism. At the height of his own family happiness he wrote in 1865, after the Polish *débauche*, to his wife: "I am quite uninterested in knowing who is oppressing the Poles, or who has conquered Schleswig-Holstein. The butcher kills the ox we eat, and I cannot be compelled either to blame him, or to express my sympathy."

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would have been much easier. The fact is that all his contradictions are the result of his *double sincerity*—the sincerity of his “flesh” and that of his “spirit.” Neither of them actually lied; yet, owing to his self-division, the truth of one was untruth from the standpoint of the other, and vice versa.

A continuous wavering between truths of this kind may become very distressing, since one never knows where one really is. Experiencing at one and the same time two entirely opposite and yet equally sincere tendencies, I can eventually try to escape the dilemma—apparently at least—by deliberately siding with one against the other. And as the voice of this other does not become still but increases with my endeavours to suppress it, say, by the “firmness” of my moral principles, I involuntarily begin to wonder whether the actions accomplished with only one part of my Ego are sincere. Perhaps all this is in essence only a display, a game with myself.

This suspicion once aroused will grow until I begin to suspect not only myself, but every one else. However sincere my single actions and impulses may be, I shall never believe in my *complete*, my total sincerity; neither shall I believe (by analogy) in the complete sincerity of

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other people. The writer Garshin, who knew Tolstoy personally, says in fact that Tolstoy thought "the men whom we consider good are only hypocrites or try to display their goodness, and that they affect to be convinced that they are doing their work for a good cause."

If such a self-divided person knew for certain that he were insincere, his position would be morally less painful; the worst part of it is that he is never quite sure whether he is sincere or insincere. In a certain sense he is both, at one and the same time. So having organised—most ardently, with all his soul and energy—the famine relief for the afflicted peasants, Tolstoy suddenly made this entry in his diary, on 3rd of May, 1893: "Was at Begichevka. Felt indifference to the empty business of relief, and repulsion at the hypocrisy. . . ." And in 1909 (July 21st), when genuinely contemplating going away in order to escape the contradictions of his life, he wrote: "There is only one thing I want—to do not my will, but Thine"; and he suddenly added, "I write and ask myself, 'Is it true? Am I posing to myself?' Help me, help me, help me!"

A passionate will to *complete* sincerity may lead in such cases on the one hand to fanaticism of

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“ principles,” and on the other to such frankness about oneself that one not only confessed one’s faults, but even grossly exaggerates them; because in these very exaggerations one wants to find an argument on behalf of *entire* sincerity. Tolstoy’s *Confession* may serve as an example of this kind. He gives in it an obvious exaggeration of his former conduct. (“ Lying, robbery, adultery, drunkenness, violence, murder—there was no crime I did not commit.”) A man of this stamp will probably derive a particular satisfaction also from indictments of other people’s insincerity. He will employ and develop all the observing faculties of his suspicious mind in chasing after proofs that the life of men, of “ society,” of civilisation, is only hypocrisy. If he happens to be a writer, he may easily become both a ruthless psychologist and an indignant social reformer. But the suffering caused by his duality will not be quieted until he achieves either a synthesis of his inner antinomies, or unconditionally suppresses one part of his ego on behalf of the other.

Tolstoy took this second course, after his conversion. He fettered his “ flesh ” with the greater severity the more he was aware of his own lurking passions and temptations. He tried to make it an “ obedient dog of the spirit.”

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IV

Yet even then his fundamental duality was not overcome. His Pagan thirst for full-blooded life asserted itself again and again in the very teeth of his asceticism. Less than a year after *Confession* he wrote to his friend, the poet Fet: "I am mad with living. . . . It is summer, the delicious summer. This year I have struggled for a long time; but the beauty of nature has conquered me. I rejoice in life."

Aylmer Maude relates in his conscientious biography of Tolstoy how in the same year (1880) the aged Turgenev complained to Tolstoy of the change in his own relations to women: "I had a love affair the other day," said he, "and will you believe it? I found it dull!"

"Ah," exclaimed Tolstoy, "if only I were like that!"

Again, in 1886 the Russian pianist, Anton Rubinstein, whom Tolstoy ranked very high, was giving a concert in Moscow, and Tolstoy was lacerated by the conflict between his inclination and his principles. He ardently wished to hear Rubinstein's recital; at the same time he disapproved of art which was not accessible to all but only to the privileged few. On

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the eve of the recital he said he was very sorry to miss the concert, as by then all tickets were sold out. Rubinstein happened to hear of Tolstoy's regret, arranged an extra seat for him, and himself sent him a ticket. Tolstoy, however, did not appear. He was overjoyed to receive the invitation; he even put on his overcoat; but here sudden doubts assailed him as to whether it were right—according to his principles—to go to the concert. The consequence of this inner struggle was a nervous attack so severe that a doctor had to be called in.

Gorky's shrewd *Reminiscences of Tolstoy* abound in precious little characteristics of Tolstoy's contradictory nature. For instance, on one occasion the passionate anti-militarist Tolstoy walked with a friend in the streets of Moscow and saw in the distance two soldiers of the Guard. "The metal of their accoutrements shone in the sun; their spurs jingled; they kept step like one man; their faces, too, shone with self-assurance of strength and youth.—Tolstoy began to grumble at them: 'What pompous stupidity! Like animals trained by the whip! . . .' But when the guardsmen came abreast with him, he stopped, followed them with his eyes, and said enthusiastically: 'How handsome! Old Romans, eh? Their

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strength and beauty! O Lord! how charming it is when man is handsome, how very charming! ' ”

Trifles like this show how much the ascetic view of life must have cost the “converted” Tolstoy. His diaries supply further examples of this kind. Here is one passage, taken at random (July 19th, 1896): “Lord, Father, release me from my base body. Cleanse me and do not let your spirit perish in me and become overgrown. I prayed twice beseechingly: firstly that He let me be His tool; and secondly, that He save me from my animal ‘self.’ ” Gorky also records in the above-mentioned work that when the aged Tolstoy liked, “he could be extraordinarily charming, sensitive, and tactful; his talk was fascinatingly simple and elegant, but sometimes it was painfully unpleasant to listen to him. I always disliked what he said about women—it was unspeakably ‘vulgar,’ and at the same time very personal. It seemed as if he had once been hurt, and could neither forget nor forgive! The evening when I first got to know him, he took me into his study—it was at Khamovniki in Moscow—and, making me sit opposite to him, he began to talk about *Varienka Oliessova* and *Twenty-Six and One*.¹

¹ Gorky's stories.

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I was overwhelmed by his tone and lost my head, he spoke so plainly and brutally, arguing that in a healthy girl chastity is not natural. . . . Then he began to speak about the girl in *Twenty-Six and One*, using a stream of indecent words with a simplicity which seemed to me cynical and even offended me."

One could give many more illustrations to the effect that Tolstoy's "flesh" was only suppressed but not really transformed through his conversion. He never became "twice born." But, remaining with the same inner self-division as so many other mortals, he lived its tension more deeply, more tragically. For every human feature was magnified in that man—be it sympathy or egotism, Epicurean joy of life or ascetic self-lacerations, the coldness of a sceptic rationalist or the spontaneity of a child of Nature. From the tension of this duality sprang some of the main qualities of his genius, qualities which may give us further clues to his complex soul.

CHAPTER III
CULTURE AND NATURE

III

CULTURE AND NATURE

I

THE great war of antinomies raging in the advanced consciousness of the present day can have a meaning only in so far as it is waged for the sake of a future wholeness, that is, of a dynamic synthesis between Flesh and Spirit. This coming synthesis must, however, in no way be confused with that pre-moral wholeness which is "beyond (or better—*before*) good and evil" simply because the working of man's spirit is still as unconscious as the working of his blood. Such primitive wholeness is perhaps the main charm of children. In fact, it belongs to the child-period of humanity: to that "golden age" in which the potential Individual is still immersed in the undifferentiated racial soul, and the racial soul in Nature,—thus partaking of those secrets and mysteries of hers which afterwards become obliterated by the development of individual consciousness.

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As long as the individual remains an integral part of the racial, tribal, or social group-soul, he has one great advantage: the feeling of that organic unity which instinctively avoids all disintegrating elements, all disturbing questions and problems. The union with the group-soul, and through it with Nature herself, allows him to participate in the elemental life of the whole race, in which he is still practically dissolved. Yet this participation is largely unconscious and often as instinctive as the life of a bee in the hive. Hence everything he does is natural and obvious, for his inward harmony is not disturbed by any reflections, "sins," or "sickly conscience." Every action of his is for him equally simple and right, whether this be the slaughter of his enemies or the painting of magnificent ornaments on his implements and on the walls of his dwelling. In this pre-moral innocence he is always as right as Nature herself.

The original sin of Man, and at the same time the inevitable step towards further evolution, begins with the separation of the individual soul from the collective group-soul. The very starting point of civilisation is the "loss of paradise": the breaking up of the harmonious collective psyche into separate

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individuals who have to find and to assert themselves at their own risk. This process of individualisation is the inevitable Golgotha of mankind. It is not only extremely painful, but also dangerous, because its main feature is disintegration, first social and then personal. Yet the growth of humanity demands such a process. Through it alone we may come to that awareness of ourselves which leads to complete self-knowledge and eventually to a new conscious unity—to a conscious assertion of man and mankind in the Universe. And, as every one knows, the machine which performs this maiming and yet creative work of division is precisely civilisation.

So the task of civilisation requires and must require an ultimate sacrifice of the "golden age." But the legend of this age remains. And not only the legend; for against the forces which drive humanity forward upon a heavy and uncertain road we can always detect a strong impulse which draws us back—back to the forfeited paradise. Instead of accepting and overcoming the painful burden of civilisation, many a sensitive person tries to avoid and reject it. Instead of looking forward towards a new unity of conscious and complete individuals—a unity on the plane of an over-individual Soul—

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their eyes are longingly turned back towards the pre-individual group-psychê. Hence they innately dislike everything that is connected with culture and civilisation, *i.e.*, with human division. They open passionate crusades against the artificiality of cultured life, preaching a return to "Nature"—to those primitive forms of existence in which the lacerated individual soul may find rest and refuge from the general human Golgotha.

Such looking backwards is at the bottom of Rousseau's "simplification." It is also at the bottom of Tolstoyanism.

II

Tolstoy has in truth many affinities with Rousseau. He himself admitted that he had read the whole of Rousseau. "I was more than enthusiastic about him—I worshipped him. At the age of fifteen I wore a medallion portrait of him next my body instead of the orthodox cross. Many of his pages are so akin to me that it seems to me I have written them myself."

This sympathy of Tolstoy for Rousseau is not casual, nor can it be reduced to a mere superficial

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influence. The truth is that the affinities between them are due to the fact that both of them suffered from the same "complex"—from the same subliminal tendency to alleviate the pain of their self-division by dissolving in "Nature." Such a tendency was all the more obvious in Tolstoy, because the acute clairvoyance of his senses which lay at the back of his artistic intuition was largely atavistic: it was on a plane which has not yet reached individual differentiation. In other terms, his very vision of things is often that of a child or of a savage who knows much more than he "understands"; who knows Nature because he himself is still Nature—half immersed in its mysteries, as well as in the mysteries of the tribe or race to which he belongs.

And so, whenever Tolstoy works with his instinctive knowledge of things, he is an incomparable artist, a genius; but no sooner does he begin to give vent to his intellectual "understanding" of life than he becomes a mere talent. His genius weakens in proportion to his distance from actual life, and grows only through an organic contact with it. Or, to quote Turgenev, "whenever he deals with the Earth, he, like Anteus, regains his forces."

Tolstoy's genius thus resided not in his reason, but in his "great Body," which revelled in the

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contact with the racial Unconscious and drew from it all its creative élan. However, if we take it for granted that a literary genius operates chiefly by exploiting the forces of the Unconscious, then we must admit that two opposite paths are here possible : one of them points forward to the future, to the "super-conscious" potencies of the race; and the other may be directed backwards—to the primitive infancy and the "paradise" of the undifferentiated racial group-soul, as well as to all its sub-conscious atavistic remains. The former is active, dynamic, Promethean ; the latter—static and passive. Nietzsche is an extreme example of a Promethean genius. And so is Dostoevsky in his volcanic chaos. Tolstoy, on the contrary, represents the opposite type: his tremendous intuition, his instincts and ruling inclinations—they all are deeply rooted in the atavistic elements of his race. Behind his "back to Nature" is concealed the unconscious longing after a pre-individual harmony and wholeness in the lap of the racial Psyche.

This longing remained in Tolstoy all his life, changing like Proteus : now inclining him towards the Pagan simplicity of the Caucasian Cossacks; then towards the "Christian" primitiveness of the Russian peasants,—to elementary

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and elemental mass-consciousness in which the individual counts for nothing. Such a feature will be, however, less surprising if we keep in mind that Tolstoy was a typical Russian, *i.e.*, the representative of a country which lies between the East and West.

While the East is still slumbering in the arcanes of the mighty racial Group-Soul, the active West has gone so far in its differentiation that the inward bonds between man and man have practically disappeared. So much so that the Western communities have already ceased to be collective organisms and are becoming, at their best, mere collective mechanisms, of which the Marxian State would be a kind of final ideal. The rapid development of industry threatens to disintegrate or "civilise" the last healthy remnants of European peasantry which, after all, is the main reservoir of the whole and wholesome Group-Soul. In colossal world-towns, humanity is breeding side by side its universal unbridled rabble of to-morrow, and the helplessly uprooted individuals of the present day. Having severed the old inner bonds, without finding new and equally strong ones, our West is drifting towards the chaos of loosened egoisms, towards the millennium of the zoological Man. Asia, on the other hand, seems to have become

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petrified in the depths of its own racial Soul. It is true, Asia's intuition is profounder than our self-complacent Western reasoning; her wisdom is, on the whole, superior to our flat philosophies, and her knowledge without "understanding" is hardly more crippling and more sterile than all our "understanding" -without real, organic knowledge. But since the counter-movement towards individualisation is and was too insignificant, the Asiatic world is still sleeping in its static contemplative quiet.¹

Jammed between these two worlds lies Russia with its curious mixture of both. Along with a compact primitive peasantry we see there the atomising Western, second-hand individualism with all its vices and none of its virtues. It was the well-meant mistake of Peter the Great that he produced artificially a "European" upper class which was entirely alien to the soil and the population of Russia. And when later an equally "European" intelligentsia arose, there was as wide a gap between the Russian masses and the Russian intellectuals, as between the masses and the bureaucrats. The whole of

¹It is partly due to the absence of strongly marked individualisation in the East that it is so easily corrupted by the very touch of European civilisation. The disintegrated European destroys in the coloured races the group-soul, while unable to give any compensation except bayonets, shops, factories, mines, alcohol, prayer-books and venereal diseases

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Russian literature since Pushkin has tried to fill up this gap,¹ but without any real success. Hence the paralysing spleen on the part of the Russian intellectuals—a spleen which has created a long gallery of “superfluous men” in their fiction and poetry—from Pushkin’s Aleko (in his epic *The Gipsies*), through Petchorin, Turgenev’s Rudin, and Gontcharov’s Oblomov, to Tchekhov’s moody characters, all of whom seem to be “superfluous” on God’s earth, and to suffer from this awareness. True, many Russian Slavophiles did their best to bridge over the gap, and so did—in a different way—the so-called repentant noblemen, and the *narodniki*¹ of the sixties, with their motto, “back to the people.” Nevertheless, all these palliatives, with their sentimental cult of the mujik, remained insufficient, until the recent revolution from below practically swept away the whole of the intelligentsia, thus solving the problem in a manner which is perhaps worse than no solution at all.

Tolstoy himself stands, of course, aside from all the intellectual movements of the nineteenth century Russia. But while his hatred of the “general tendency” made him entirely unfit to join any group, the subliminal instincts

¹ From the Russian word “*narod*,” which means both people and nation

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of his Body continually drew him back to "Nature," to the patriarchal Russian peasantry, to the group-consciousness of primitive masses in general. Although one of the main springs of his literary creation was egotistic self-analysis and search for the "salvation" of his personal soul, this very search brought him eventually to an utter negation of Ego. And the more he suffered from his growing contradictions, the more he endeavoured to soften them by lowering his own consciousness, *i.e.*, by dissolving his Ego either in impersonal masses, in "brotherly love," or, eventually in an equally impersonal God. Already at the age of twenty-three he wrote in his diary (July 4th, 1851): "Always I shall assert that consciousness is the greatest moral evil that can befall a man." And in 1890, he says in a letter (to E. T. Popov) on the same subject: "Individuality is weakness. In order to get rid of it we must find some purpose outside ourselves—we must forget ourselves in work (as one does when making boots, or ploughing), in the work of a whole life. Personality cannot be appeased. No sooner has it appeared than it begins to torment itself and to suffer."

So it comes about that Tolstoy is drawn to the

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pre-individual collective whole in order to find in it a haven of rest for his own suffering Ego. Therefore he instinctively hates everything that may foster the disintegration of compact primitive collectives into separate and selfconscious individuals. He pretends not even to believe in strong personalities as such, being in this respect the exact opposite of Carlyle. What has he not said in order to exhibit Napoleon as a small and ridiculous tool in the hands of Fate! Tolstoy's portrait of Napoleon in *War and Peace* can, in fact, hardly be surpassed in subtle malicious touches, dictated, as it were, also by the personal rancour of the author. And it is not by chance that he contrasts the active Napoleon with the indolent and passive Kutuzov—the Russian generalissimo who dozes during the most important war councils, quietly leaving events to take care of themselves. Kutuzov, as Tolstoy conceives him, knows that the real spring of history is not the individual but only the unconscious group-soul of the masses which the leader must follow rather than direct. True political and strategical wisdom consists, according to Tolstoy, in the intuitive penetration into that soul, on whose instinctive workings he bases his entire philosophy of history, asserting that “in historical events we see more plainly

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than ever the law of the Tree of Knowledge. It is only unselfconscious activity that bears fruit, and the man who plays a part in an historical drama never understands its significance. If he strives to comprehend it he is stricken with barrenness."

Tolstoy's *War and Peace* is perhaps the greatest epic of mass-psychology that has ever been created. And it is not surprising that Count Pierre Bezoukhov, the civilised seeker after truth, discovers the final wisdom in the illiterate peasant, Platon Karatayev—the mouth-piece of soil and Nature. Also in *The Cossacks* the representative of the upper classes, Olenin, falls in love with the pretty and half-savage Cossack girl, Marianka, just because "she is like Nature."—"Maybe in her I love Nature, the personification of everything beautiful in Nature; but I have not my own will, and through me an elementary force loves her, and the whole world, all Nature, impresses this love upon my soul, and says to me, 'Love!' I love her not with my mind, not with my imagination, but with my whole being. Loving her, I feel myself an inseparable part of the whole blissful world of the Lord."

This conception of the Unconscious Tolstoy tried to enlarge even in some of his earliest

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works, by giving it a pantheistic tinge. So in *Luzern*, for example, he says: "There is one, but one sinless leader, the Universal Spirit, who penetrates us all as he does one and each separately, who imparts to each the tendency towards that which is right; that same Spirit, who orders the tree to grow towards the sun, orders the flower to cast seeds in the autumn, and orders us to hold together unconsciously."

The imperative "to hold together unconsciously," which sprang from Tolstoy's basic instinct, soon became his *daimonion*, prompting eventually also his rational teaching about morality and the meaning of life.

III

The intensity of this imperative may in part explain why Tolstoy was likely, *psychologically*, to be "converted" to Christianity, with its brotherly love, and why this love took in him a direction backwards—towards undifferentiated masses.

Already in 1875, that is, four years before his *Confession*, Tolstoy wrote to his friend, the poet Fet, about his experiences in the steppes of Samara where he had bought an estate: "Why

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fate took me there [to the steppes] I do not know, but I know that I have listened to speeches in the English Parliament, which is considered very important, and it seemed to me dull and insignificant; but there, are flies, dirt, and Bashkir peasants, and I, watching them with respect and anxiety, became absorbed in listening to them and watching them, and felt it all to be very important."

He himself gives (in *Confession*) a poignant description of the inner torments which increased in him about that time, and from which he finally sought shelter in the simple wisdom of the simple folk.

"The reasoning showing the vanity of life is not so difficult," he says, "and has long been familiar to the very simplest folk; yet they have lived and still live. How is it they still live and never think of doubting the reasonableness of life?"

"My knowledge, confirmed by the wisdom of the sages, has shown me that everything on earth, organic and inorganic, is all most cleverly arranged—only my own position is stupid. And those fools—the enormous masses of people—know nothing about how everything organic and inorganic in the world is arranged: but they live, and it seems to them that their life is very wisely arranged! . . .

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“And it struck me: ‘But what if there is something I do not yet know? Ignorance behaves just in that way. Ignorance always says just what I am saying. When it does not know something, it says that what it does not know is stupid. Indeed, it appears that there is a whole humanity that lived and lives as if it understood the meaning of its life, for without understanding it could not live; but I say that all this life is senseless and that I cannot live.

“Nothing prevents our denying life by suicide. Well, then, kill yourself, and you won’t discuss. If life displeases you, kill yourself! You live, and cannot understand the meaning of life—then finish it; and do not fool about in life, saying and writing that you do not understand it. You have come into good company, where people are contented and know what they are doing; if you find it dull and repulsive—go away!

“Indeed, what are we who are convinced of the necessity of suicide, yet do not decide to commit it, but the weakest, most inconsistent, and, to put it plainly, the stupidest of men, fussing about with our own stupidity as a fool fusses about with a painted hussy? For our wisdom, however indubitable it may be, has not

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given us the meaning of our life. But all mankind, who sustain life—millions of them—do not doubt the meaning of life.

“Indeed, from the most distant times of which I know anything, when life began, people have lived, knowing the argument about the vanity of life, which has shown me its senselessness, and yet they lived attributing some meaning to it.

“From the time when any life began among men, they had that meaning of life, and they led that life, which has descended to me. All that is in me and around me, all corporeal and incorporeal, is the fruit of their knowledge of life. Those very instruments of thought with which I consider this life and condemn it were all devised not by me, but by them. I myself was born, taught, and brought up, thanks to them. They dug out the iron, taught us to cut down the forests, tamed the cows and horses, taught us to sow corn and to live together, organised our life and taught me to think and speak. And I, their product, fed, supplied with drink, taught by them, thinking with their thoughts and words, have argued that they were an absurdity! ‘There is something wrong,’ said I to myself. ‘I have blundered somewhere.’”

Thus we see the gradual proceeding of

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Tolstoy's logic towards the same group-soul by which he was unconsciously attracted through his inmost instincts. When his moralising intellect began to undermine the root of his full-blooded spontaneity *his dominant subliminal impulse pushed his very reasoning in the direction of pre-individual group-consciousness.*

"Reason worked," he acknowledges a few lines further, "but something else was also working which I can only call a consciousness of life. A force was working which compelled me to turn my attention to this and not to that; and it was this force which extricated me from my desperate situation and turned my mind in quite another direction. This force compelled me to turn my attention to the fact that I and a few hundred similar people are not the whole of mankind, but that I did not yet know the life of mankind."

It is hardly necessary to repeat that this force was the powerful imperative "back to Nature"—not through the highest affirmation, but through the negation of his own lacerated self, which he wished to obliterate in the great impersonal collective in the same way as a drop of water obliterates itself in the sea. Such self-effacement he even proclaimed as the very condition of love, emphasising again and again

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that 'love is love only when it is the annihilation of one's individual self.'

"To many it seems that if you exclude personality from life and a love for it, then nothing will remain," we read in his diary (30th of June, 1898). "It seems to them that without personality there is no life. But this only appears so to people who have not experienced self-renunciation. Throw off personality from life, renounce it, and then there will remain that which makes the essence of life—love. . . ."

"We talk of the future life, of immortality," one finds in his private correspondence. "What is immortal is only what is not I. Love. God. Nature."

IV

One could multiply examples from his books *ad infinitum*. We have chosen the above lines mainly because they are intimate avowals stressing that depersonalising Pantheism and the Buddhistic weariness with self which drove Tolstoy to pre-individual social collectives and made him at last adopt the meaning of life he had discovered in the labouring masses of the Russian mujiks.

"Thanks either to the strange physical

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affection I have for the real labouring people, which compelled me to understand them and to see that they are not so stupid as we suppose, or thanks to the sincerity of my conviction that I could know nothing beyond the fact that the best I could do was to hang myself, at any rate I instinctively felt that if I wished to live and understand the meaning of life, I must seek this meaning not among those who have lost it and wish to kill themselves, but among those milliards of the past and present who make life and who support the burden of their own lives and of ours also. And I considered the enormous masses of those simple, unlearned, and poor people who have lived and are living. . . .”

Tolstoy now began to frame his moral rules only according to the values by which those “enormous masses” live. It was in the name of these values that he attempted to transform all modern life—cutting off without mercy everything that might threaten the pre-individual compactness of mankind. And since Culture and Civilisation are the main agents of division, and therefore the greatest obstacles on the path “back to Nature,” Tolstoy rejected them wholesale. In a talk with the Russian pianist Goldenweiser, he once recalled Lichtenberg’s aphorism that mankind will finally perish when

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not a single savage is left, and said with regret : " I first turned to the Japanese, but they have already successfully adopted all the bad sides of our culture. The Kaffirs are the only hope remaining. . . ." He grasped with an almost pathologic eagerness at every opportunity of accusing all aspects of culture ; an eagerness which is responsible for many a narrow and unjust incrimination on his part; for instance, his frequent and unconvincing onslaughts on the medical profession. Thus in *Kreutzer Sonata* (1889), Tolstoy does not shrink from proclaiming (through his mouth-piece, Poznyshev) all doctors as criminals—partly even on the ground that during the epidemics they isolate the infected " brothers " from the rest of mankind: " If you hearken to their counsels (so numerous and dangerous are the germs of disease that lurk in wait for you at every step you take), whatever you do will tend not to draw you closer to your fellow-men, but to separate you from them more than ever. If the doctors' behests were faithfully carried out, every one of us should sit apart, completely isolated from every one else, and would never think of putting the syringe with the carbolic acid out of his hands. . . . "

Owing to the same subliminal bias, Tolstoy was always ready to cling to and to praise

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everything that was connected with folk-masses. Once he proclaimed quite an average composition of a peasant boy as higher than the works of Goethe. He also rated the Russian folk-songs above Beethoven, whose Ninth Symphony he rejected on the assumption that this work "causes social disunion." Already in his pedagogic magazine, *Yasnaya Polyana*, he asserted that Beethoven and Pushkin please us," not because there is any absolute beauty in them, but because we are just as corrupted as Pushkin and Beethoven; because Pushkin and Beethoven alike flatter our perverted irritability and our weakness." For the same reason he did his best to prove that Shakespeare, with his aristocratic contempt for the mob, "cannot be ranked as a writer of the fourth order," etc., etc.

What an unbearable inward loneliness must have been experienced by a man who was so much afraid of "isolation"! It is an irony of fate that some of those pages on which he eloquently talks of brotherly love contain more passionate will to love than love itself. Although his instincts were rooted in the masses, his analysing and sceptical reason drew, again and again, an enchanted circle round his Ego, making him hopelessly lonely, isolated. Hence all his conscious endeavours to prove the contrary

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—to prove it to himself and to others—through becoming one of the masses, a real peasant.

It was in June, 1881, that he made a pilgrimage to the famous Optin Monastery in bast-shoes of peasant make, exactly as a pious peasant pilgrim would have done. His peasant blouses, peasant overcoats, and bare feet, the scythes and sickles in his study, his ploughing, have become renowned all over the world—largely owing to his friend, the painter Ryepin. But his efforts did not finish here. Anna Seuron, who for several years was governess in Tolstoy's family, relates that in 1883, Tolstoy, the Russian Count, and world-famous author, began to take lessons in boot-making. Once he appeared in high hunting-boots of his own make, and was very pleased when the guests praised them. Talking with enthusiasm about boot-making, he even gave a demonstration in threading the waxen end, sitting on a low bench and conscientiously imitating his teacher. The same witness records that for a while he entirely neglected his personal appearance and cleanliness. "He, who had always worn fine socks, suddenly demanded strips of linen, and began to wrap his legs in them as peasants do. . . . One day he announced that though lice, considered as insects,

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are dirty, yet a poor man should not be considered dirty for being lousy. Being poor, he is a natural prey to lice. To be clean requires means; it is a luxury."

Some, if not all, of his simplifications in other domains are of an equally naive kind. But their essence will be better understood if we first analyse another main cause of Tolstoy's inward isolation—his horror of Death.

CHAPTER IV
THE SHADOW OF DEATH

IV

THE SHADOW OF DEATH

I

AN excess of physical vitality and *instinctive* joy in life with all its wealth and beauty was one pole of Tolstoy's artistic creation. Hence it is obvious that its other pole should be an equally excessive fear of that which threatens to destroy vitality, joy and beauty: the fear of Death. Death and decay are a direct negation of life, and therefore throw a haunting shadow upon all things passing. Beauty and joy of existence can be definitely accepted only on condition that life should not flow and drift away to its own destruction. "But life flows," complains Tolstoy in one of his passages. "And what does this mean? Life flows—means: the hair falls out, becomes gray; the teeth decay; wrinkles, bad smell in the mouth. Even before everything is finished it assumes a dreadful, repulsive appearance; one notices the layers of rouge and powder, perspiration, stench, deformity.

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And where is that which I served? Where is beauty? . . . There is no beauty—there is nothing. There is no life. Apart from the fact that there is no life in that in which there seemed to be life, you yourself begin to drift away from it, to get weaker, uglier; you rot away, others snatch from you those pleasures in which you found your happiness of existence.”

This horror of decay and death became one of the central knots of Tolstoy's life and work. Step by step, it grew in him to such an extent as to make him eventually yearn for a kind of Buddhistic self-extinction—simply in order to get rid of the horror itself. In all his philosophy, in his moral and religious doctrines, we feel a continuous duel with it; a continuous attempt to find a “reasonable” justification of an apparently senseless and cruel end. In other terms, life—having become self-conscious—threatened to turn against itself because of the absence of an adequate “meaning of life.” The stronger one's vitality the more distressing may become this absence, until the vitality destroys itself, perceiving that everything is vain and empty in the face of death.

“I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I laboured to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of

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spirit, and there was no profit from them under the sun. And I turned to myself to behold wisdom, and madness, and folly. . . . But I perceived that one event happened to them all. Then said I in my heart, as it happeneth to the fool, so it happeneth even to me, and why was I then more wise? Then I said in my heart, that this also is vanity. For there is no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool for ever; seeing that which now is in the days to come shall be forgotten. And how dies the wise man? as the fool. Therefore I hated life. . . . This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that there is one event unto all; yea, also the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart and while they live, and after that they go to the dead. For him that is among the living there is no hope: for a living dog is better than a dead lion. For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not anything, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun."

If Solomon had been a weak and anaemic man he could never have written these words,

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which Tolstoy applies also to himself. This is the despair of great strength, and of a great love for life which turns into hatred at the idea of death. And Tolstoy was continuously haunted by it. Descriptions of death abound in his works. The magnificent opening chapters of *War and Peace*, for instance, are already permeated with the atmosphere of death: while social entertainments run their gay course in the aristocratic salons, the old Count Bezoukhov is nearing his end, lonely, helpless and numb, in his spacious palace. Or take the death of the young Princess Bolkonsky, of her husband, Prince Andrey, of Petya Rostov (who is the very embodiment of charming boyhood), and of scores of others. Then the horrid details of Levin's brother's death in *Anna Karenina*! Or the end of Anna herself. And is it possible to tell a more terrifying story than *The Death of Ivan Ilyitch*?

The fear of death hovers also over Tolstoy's earlier works. The serene flow of his first book (*Childhood*) is disturbed by death. The Sebastopol Sketches are full of it. The bubbling life of *The Cossacks* is darkened by the approaching end of the mortally wounded Lukashka. One of Tolstoy's best short stories is *Three Deaths* (1858), in which he describes the end of

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a rich, capricious lady, of a primitive mujik, and of a tree.

This contrast between an upper-class woman, a peasant, and a tree is not casual. Tolstoy tries to discover through it, as it were, an efficient remedy against the crushing fear of death. And the remedy he offers is simple indeed. Its formula could be expressed like this: the lower the consciousness the easier the death. The cultured and refined lady dies in terrible agony; the simple mujik passes away naturally and without any peculiar fear or worry. The death of the tree is the easiest because the tree has no consciousness. With regard to this story, he wrote to the Countess A. Tolstoy on 1st May, 1858:—

“ Here we arrive at a point where we disagree concerning my story. You are wrong in examining it from a Christian standpoint. My idea was this: three beings die—a lady, a peasant, a tree. The worldly lady is pitiable and wretched because she lived in lies and also dies in them. Christianity, as she understands it, does not solve for her the problem of life and death. Why should she die since she wants to live? Through her imagination and her mind she believes in the promise of a life beyond, yet her whole being rebels, because she does not

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know (except her false Christianity) any other solace. This is why she is wretched and pitiable.

"The peasant dies in peace, and he does so just because he is not a Christian. Although he keeps by habit to the Christian observances, his religion is a different one; his religion is the Nature in the midst of which he lives. With his own hands he cuts the trees, mows, kills the sheep and breeds others as naturally as children are born and old men die; he knows this law of nature and has never turned away from it as the old lady did; he simply looks at nature face to face. 'An animal,' you will say, and why not? Is there anything bad in it? An animal means beauty and happiness, and harmony with the whole universe, and not a discord as is the case with the lady.

"The tree dies with calm, freedom and beauty, because it does not lie, does not distort itself, does not fear, does not regret. This is my idea of which, I am certain, you won't approve, yet one cannot argue about it: it is in your soul as well as in mine."

Then he adds as a kind of self-justification: "The Christian feeling is very strong in me; I feel it and am fond of it. It is the feeling of truth and of beauty, while the other one is a personal feeling—that of love and peace."

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II

In Tolstoy's *Confession* we find abundant proof of his encroaching dread of death, as well as of his failures to escape this dread, which grew with every new experience of the Destroyer's work. He made a close acquaintance with it during the siege of Sebastopol, which he has finely described, and had many less picturesque encounters with it in later life. He was particularly oppressed by the death of his consumptive brother, Nicholas, at Hyères in 1860, and complained on that occasion :—

“It will soon be a month since Nikolenka died. This event has dreadfully torn me away from life. Again the question: Why? I am not far from going there. Where? Nowhere. I am trying to write, compelling myself, but unsuccessfully, for the sole reason that I cannot attribute to my work that significance which is necessary to have the power and the patience to work. During the funeral itself, the thought came to me to write a materialistic gospel, the life of Christ—as a materialist.”

And only a few days later (17th October) he wrote to Fet: “I presume you already know what has happened. On the 20th of September

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he died, literally in my arms. Nothing in life has ever produced such an impression upon me. He spoke the truth when he used to say there is nothing worse than death. And when one clearly realises that it is the end of all, then there is nothing worse than life either. What should one worry about or strive for, if of that which was Nicholas Tolstoy nothing has remained? He did not say that he felt the approach of death, but I know that he followed its every step and knew for certain how much yet remained. A few minutes before death he fell into a doze and suddenly awoke and murmured with horror, 'But what is this?' He had seen it, this absorption of oneself in nothing. And if he found nothing to catch hold of, what can I find? Still less. And it is certain that neither myself nor any one will so struggle with it to the last moment as he did. . . .

"A thousand times did I say to myself: Let the dead bury the dead, and let us use to some purpose our remaining strength. But one cannot attempt to persuade a stone to fall upward instead of downward, as attraction takes it. One cannot laugh at a joke one is tired of. One cannot eat when one has no appetite. Of what avail is anything when to-morrow will begin the agonies of death with all the abomination

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of falsehood and self-delusion, and when all will end in nothing, in absolute nought for oneself. An amusing situation indeed. 'Be useful, be virtuous, be happy while you are alive,' people say to each other; but thyself and happiness and virtue and utility consist in truth. And the truth I have gathered out of a life of thirty-two years is that the position we are placed in is dreadful. 'Take life as it is,' they continue. Quite right! I do take life as it is. As soon as men reach the highest degree of development, they clearly see that all is bunkum, deceit; and that truth, which, after all, they value most—that this truth is awful, and that when you see it well and distinctly, you awake with horror as my brother did: 'But what is this?' Of course, as long as there is a desire to know and express the truth, one endeavours to know and express it. This is all that has remained for me out of the moral world, and higher than that I cannot place myself. And this alone I will do, but not in the form of your art. Art is a lie, and I can no longer love a beautiful lie."

"A boy of thirteen has died from consumption," he laments in the same year. "What for? The only explanation is given by faith in the compensation of a future life. If that

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does not exist, there is no justice, and justice is vain, and the demand for justice—a superstition.”

Although Tolstoy was only thirty-two when he wrote these lines, one can distinctly anticipate in them the Tolstoy of the *Confession* (written nineteen years later). His subsequent rupture with art, his self-effacing and, in its own way, materialistic Christianity, his moralising effusions, his eventual flight from family and home—all this is partly foreshadowed in the above passages.

“If a man has learned to think, no matter what he may think about, he is always thinking of his own death. All philosophers were like that. And what truth can there be, if there is death?” Tolstoy once said to Gorky, thus properly defining one of the underlying ideas of all his later works. For if in the first half of his literary activities Tolstoy wrote mainly in order to assert and revel in exuberant life, even in the face of death, his second half is nothing but a continuous endeavour to justify death in the face of life and to make it less terrible. In this endeavour he tried to hold himself now by a “reasonable” Christianity, then by exaggerated ascetic rules, again by trying to dissolve his individuality either in the

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group-consciousness, or in a nihilistic Nirvana, which he often confuses with God.

The breaking-point between the two periods is, of course, his *Confession*, in the very beginning of which he relates how his life came to a complete standstill for the lack of a meaning of life, or—better still—for the lack of a meaning of death.

“At first I experienced moments of perplexity and arrest of life, as though I did not know how to live and what to do,” he says of the few years preceding his conversion, “and I felt lost, and became dejected. But this passed, and I went on living as before. Then these moments of perplexity began to recur oftener and oftener, and always in the same form: What is it for? What does it lead to? I felt that what I had been standing on had broken down, and that I had nothing left under my feet. What I had lived by no longer existed, and I had nothing left to live by. My life came to a standstill, I could not breathe, eat, drink, and sleep, and I could not help doing these things; but there was no life, for there were no wishes the fulfilment of which I considered reasonable. . . . Had a fairy come and offered to fulfil my desires I should not have known what to ask. . . . If in a moment of intoxication I felt something

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which I cannot call a wish, but a habit left by former wishes, in sober moments I knew this to be a delusion, and that there is really nothing to wish for, I could not even wish to know the truth, for I guessed in what it consisted. The truth was that life was meaningless. I had, as it were, lived, lived and walked, walked till I had come to a precipice, and saw clearly that there was nothing ahead of me but destruction. It was impossible to stop, impossible to go back, and impossible to close my eyes or avoid seeing that there was nothing ahead but suffering and real death—complete annihilation.

“My mental condition presented itself to me in this way: my life is a stupid and spiteful joke some one has played on me. . . . Involuntarily it appeared to me that there, somewhere, was some one who amused himself by watching how I lived for thirty or forty years: learning, developing, maturing in body and mind, and how—having with matured mental powers reached the summit of life from which it all lay before me, I stood on that summit—like an arch-fool—seeing clearly that there is nothing in life, and that there has been and will be nothing. And he was amused. . . .

“But whether that ‘some one’ laughing at me existed or not, I was not the better off. I

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could give no reasonable meaning to any single action, or to my whole life. I was only surprised that I could have avoided understanding this from the very beginning—it has been so long known to all. To-day or to-morrow sickness or death will come to those I love, or to me; nothing will remain but stench and worms. Sooner or later my affairs, whatever they may be, will be forgotten, and I shall not exist. Then why go on making any effort? . . . How can man fail to see this? And how go on living? That is what is surprising! One can only live while one is intoxicated with life; as soon as one is sober it is impossible not to see that it is all mere fraud and a stupid fraud! That is precisely what it is: there is nothing either amusing or witty about it: it is simply cruel and stupid.

“The deception of the joys of life which formerly allayed my terror of the dragon [*i.e.*, death] now no longer deceived me. No matter how often I may be told, ‘You cannot understand the meaning of life, so do not think about it, but live,’ I can no longer do it: I have already done it too long. I cannot now help seeing day and night going round and bringing me to death. That is all I see, for that alone is true. All else is false. The two drops of honey

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which diverted my eyes from the cruel truth longer than the rest: my love of family, and of writing—art as I called it—were no longer sweet to me. ‘Family’ . . . said I to myself. But my family—wife and children—are also human. They are placed just as I am: they must either live in a lie or see the terrible truth. Why should they live? Why should I love them, guard them, bring them up, or watch them? That they may come to the despair that I feel, or else be stupid? Loving them, I cannot hide the truth from them: each step in knowledge leads them to the truth. And truth is death.”

As Tolstoy further explains, he summoned all the resources that philosophy, science and the Church could offer him, but none of them proved sufficient. The grin of death seemed so menacing to his self that ultimately he tried to get rid of the fear by getting rid of his individual self. In a round-about way he thus came again back to the group-consciousness: this time not in order to revel in it in his “Pagan” fashion, but in order to conceal himself in it from his animal fear. He wished to dissolve in the “aggregate of individualities” in the same fashion as a Buddhist dissolves in Nirvana. In a sense he found in it a successful substitute

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for Nirvana itself, of which, by the way, he had considerable theoretical knowledge. It was particularly in the summer, 1869, that he studied with extreme enthusiasm all the works of Schopenhauer, and even contemplated translating them. He did not hesitate to proclaim him, in a letter to Fet (30th August, 1869), as the greatest of all geniuses. . . . Indeed, a foretaste of Tolstoy's enthusiasm for Schopenhauer and Nirvana shows itself as early as in Prince Andrey's soliloquy on the battle-field of Austerlitz.

When, wounded and face to face with death, Prince Andrey Bolkonsky had come to himself, after the battle, he opened his eyes, and "above him there was nothing but sky—the lofty sky, not clear, but still immeasurably lofty, with gray clouds creeping quietly over it. 'How quietly, peacefully, and triumphantly, and not like us, running, shouting and fighting, not like the Frenchmen and artillerymen dragging the mop from one another with frightened and frantic faces, how differently are those clouds creeping over that lofty, limitless sky. How was it I did not see that lofty sky before? And how happy I am to have found it at last. Yes! All is vanity, all is cheat, except that infinite sky. There is nothing, nothing but that. But even

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that is not; there is nothing but peace and stillness. And thank God! . . .’”

Even his former ideal, Napoleon, now seemed to Bolkonsky trifling and petty “with his paltry vanity and glee of victory.” Gazing into the eyes of Napoleon, who happened to pass by, “Prince Andrey mused on the nothingness of greatness, on the nothingness of life, of which no one could comprehend the significance, and on the nothingness—still more—of death, the meaning of which could be understood and explained by none of the living.”

“How good it would be,” thought Prince Andrey, as he glanced at the holy image which his sister Marie had hung round his neck with great emotion and reverence, “how good it would be if all were clear and simple as it seems to Marie. How good to know where to seek aid in this life and what to expect after it, there beyond the grave! How happy and at peace should I be if I could say now, ‘Lord, have mercy on me! . . .’ But to whom am I to say that? Either to a Power infinite, inconceivable, to which I cannot appeal, which I cannot even put into words, the great whole, or nothing, or that God, who has been sewn up here in this locket by Marie? There is nothing, nothing certain but the nothingness of all that is

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comprehensible to us, and the grandeur of something incomprehensible, but more important."

Does not the psychology of Nirvana shine in these lines with all its seductive glow? And, Tolstoy, in the period of his great weariness, welcomed it in all its shapes and disguises. It was not for nothing that he relished Schopenhauer. "In Nirvana there is nothing to laugh at; still less is there cause for anger," he wrote to Fet in 1872. "We all (I, at least) feel that it is much more interesting than life; but I agree that however much I may think about it, I can think of nothing else than that Nirvana is nothingness. I only stand up for one thing: religious reverence—awe of that Nirvana. There is at any rate nothing more important than it."

III

Tolstoy's life after his so-called conversion was, in effect, mainly a "religious reverence" and worship of Nirvana in various forms. Instead of rising to that mystical God-consciousness (in Christ's sense) in which death loses all its terror, Tolstoy lowered the idea of God to the plane of the "Nirvanic" group-consciousness, proclaiming the instinct of *pre-individual*

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“ brotherly love ” as the voice of God, as God Himself. It is in this impulse that he tries to find a radical alleviation of his personal pain of existence, and the ultimate refuge from his fear of death. Sometimes it seems as if he wanted to forget himself through his brotherly love in the same way as certain people forget themselves in alcohol. “ In order to save oneself, *i.e.* in order not to be unhappy and suffering, one must forget oneself,” he confesses candidly in his diary (Dec. 25th, 1894), and goes on: “ The only way of doing this is to forget oneself through love; but the majority of people succumb to temptations, and neither like nor wish to forget themselves by means of love, but endeavour to forget themselves by means of tobacco, wine, opium, arts.”

Further psychological illustrations of Tolstoy’s “ altruistic ” motives may be found in all his chief works. In *What I Believe*, for example, he voices : “ Death, death, death awaits you every second. Your life passes in the presence of death. If you labour personally for your own future, you yourself know that the one thing awaiting you is—death. And that death ruins all you work for. Consequently, life for oneself can have no meaning. If there is a reasonable life it must be found elsewhere; it

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must be a life the aim of which does not lie in preparing further life for oneself. To live rationally one must live so that death cannot destroy life."

In other words, one must live and work only for others, in the name of the impersonal collective, of the race, of "mankind," of the "will of God." Not an over-individual, but a "Nirvanic" (*i.e.*, unindividual) love is required, and, as Tolstoy says, in this love alone is salvation. "If a man could place his happiness in the happiness of other beings, that is, if he would love them more than himself, then death would not represent to him that discontinuance of happiness and life, such as it does represent to a man who lives only for himself. Death, to the man who lived only for others, could not seem to be a cessation of happiness and life because the happiness and the life of other beings is not only not interrupted with the life of a man who saves them, but is frequently augmented and heightened by the sacrifice of his life."

This is how he muses in his pamphlet, *On Life*. It is in this sense that he transvalued Christianity and Christ, in which process he naturally aimed first of all at safety from his gruesome bogey, death. As he acknowledges in

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his intimate diary (July 13th, 1896), "Christianity does not give happiness, but safety; it lets you down to the bottom from which there is no place to fall. . . ." And only a few weeks earlier (May 17th) he made this equally characteristic avowal: "To him who lives a spiritual life entirely, life here becomes so uninteresting and burdensome that he can part with it easily."

The more he wanted to forget himself the more he increased his will to love, as well as his clinging to those very masses to which he was driven by his own "strange physical affection." He began to 'draw near to the believers among the poor, simple, unlettered folk: pilgrims, monks, sectarians, and peasants. For, "the whole life of believers in our circle was a contradiction of their faith, but the whole life of the working-folk believers was a confirmation of the meaning of life which their faith gave them. And I began to look well into the life and faith of these people, and the more I considered it the more I became convinced that they have a real faith, which is a necessity to them and alone gives their life a meaning and makes it possible for them to live. . . . In contrast with what I had seen in our circle, where the whole of life is passed in

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idleness, amusement, and dissatisfaction, I saw that the whole life of these people was passed in heavy labour, and that they were content with life. In contradiction to the way in which people of our circle oppose fate and complain of it on account of deprivations and sufferings, these people accepted illness and sorrow without any perplexity or opposition, and with a quiet and firm conviction that all is good. In contradiction to us, who the wiser we are the less we understand the meaning of life, and see some evil irony in the fact that we suffer and die, these folk live and suffer, and *they approach death and suffering with tranquillity and in most cases gladly.*¹ In contrast to the fact that a tranquil death, a death without horror and despair, is a very rare exception in our circle, *a troubled, rebellious, and unhappy death is the rarest exception among the people.*¹ And such people, lacking all that for us and for Solomon is the only good of life, and yet experiencing the greatest happiness, are a great multitude."

Having thus discovered a safe refuge in which "a tranquil death, a death without horror and despair," is well-nigh a probability, Tolstoy learnt to love (as he says) consciously these

¹ Italics are mine.

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simple people. "The more I came to know their life, the life of those who are living and of others who are dead, of whom I read and heard, the more I loved them and the easier it became for me to live. So I went on for about two years, and a change took place in me which had long been preparing, and the promise of which had always been in me. It came about that the life of our circle, the rich and learned, not merely became distasteful to me, but lost all meaning in my eyes. All our actions, discussions, science and art presented themselves to me in a new light. I understood that it is all merely self-indulgence, and that to find a meaning in it is impossible; while the life of the whole labouring people, the whole of mankind who produce life, appeared to me in its true significance. I understood that *that* is life itself, and that the meaning given to that life is true; and I accepted it."

IV

The meaning of that life is simple: one must live and labour only for others; one must love them not as oneself, but *more* than oneself. One must love them through absolute self-effacement, disappear in them.

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Ivan Ilyitch discovered this truth only on his death-bed, and even there, amid his terrible agonies, he found happiness (so Tolstoy says) in the idea that he must die as quickly as possible in order not to cause a prolonged worry to the members of his family, by tying them to his own death-bed; that he must lovingly free them from all further sorrow. 'How simple it all is!' he thought. 'And the pain? What has become of that? Where has it gone? Where is the pain? Death? Where is he?'

"He tried to recall his former fear and anxiety of death, but he could not. 'Where is it gone? Where is Death?' He no longer had any fear or anxiety of death, for him death no longer existed. In the place of Death he saw *Light*.

"'So that is it,' he suddenly cried aloud. 'What joy!'"

Having once discovered that safe "bottom from which there is no place to fall," Tolstoy tried to conceal his fear by coquetting with death; by exalting it even into a semblance of joy.

"Oh, not to forget death for a moment, into which at any time you can fall," we read in his diary (February 13th, 1896); "if we would only remember that we are not standing upon an even plain (if you think you are standing so,

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then you are only imagining that those who have gone away have fallen overboard and you yourself are afraid that you will fall overboard), but that we are rolling on, without stopping, running into each other, getting ahead and being got ahead of, yonder behind the curtain which hides from us those who are going away, and will hide us from those who remain. . If we remember that always, then how easy and joyous it is to live and roll together, yonder down the same incline, in the power of God, with Whom we have been and in Whose power we are now and will be afterwards and for ever. I have been feeling this very keenly."

This may point to an almost religious exaltation of death, behind which there remains, however, the same old fear, but now masked. Is it necessary to add that such intense, almost animal fear of death as that of Tolstoy is typical of a man who secretly believes only in material existence, and, at the same time, strives with all his soul against his own materialism, which he cannot and does not accept? An inquiry into Tolstoy's religion may throw more light upon this problem.

CHAPTER V
TOLSTOY AND RELIGION

V

TOLSTOY AND RELIGION

I

AFTER a cursory examination of those elements which led Tolstoy to his open conversion, we can more safely approach various characteristics of the religious teaching he launched on the world under the name of true Christianity. For, whatever the logical content of this teaching may be, psychologically it is rooted in the same subliminal impulses as the act of his conversion. His Christian convictions and tendencies certainly did not come to him suddenly, but ripened step by step from his very youth.

The proud idea of becoming the founder of a new religion goes as far back as Tolstoy's early twenties. "A conversation about divinity has suggested to me a great, a stupendous idea, to the realisation of which I feel myself capable of devoting my life," he wrote in his diary during the Crimean Campaign. "This idea is the founding of a new religion corresponding

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to the present state of mankind : *the religion of Christianity, but purged of dogmas and mysticism ; a practical religion not promising future bliss, but giving bliss on earth.* I understand that to accomplish this the conscious labour of generations will be needed. One generation will bequeath the idea to the next, and some day fanaticism or reason will accomplish it. *Deliberately to promote the union of mankind*¹ by religion—that is the basic thought, which, I hope, will dominate me.”

Tolstoy gradually became dominated by this basic thought, as he calls it, to such an extent that he could not help seeking for its expression even at those moments when scepticism threatened to undermine, or even did undermine, all belief in him. Even in his moralising love-letters to Valerie Arseniev, he could not abstain from talking of religion. “ Whatever our future relations are,” he admonishes her in 1856, “ let us never speak about religion and all that refers to it. You know that I am a believer, but it may well be that my faith will differ from yours; and this question should never be touched, particularly by people who want to love each other. . . . Religion is a great thing, especially for women. . . . Keep to it, don’t speak of it, and

¹ Italics are mine.

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without falling into extremes, fulfil its dogmas."

That voice which inwardly urged Tolstoy to promote the "union of mankind" by religion was on an irrational plane. It was the voice of his *daimonion*. Yet Tolstoy's intellect through which it tried to work was by its nature averse to any kind of irrationality. So much so that it accepted and sanctioned only those ideas or convictions which were able to pass through the strictest quarantine on the part of his reason. In other terms, while his main unconscious impulse was all the time ready to draw him into the mysteries of an irrational religion, his own pedantic rationalism barred him the way to it. So he had a continuous organic need of religion as such, and a continuous intellectual reluctance to it. The result of this tension was that he eventually reduced the whole of religion simply to a moral system which was "reasonable" enough to stand the scrutiny of his intellect.

His very conversion shows—in so far as it was achieved consciously—no spontaneity, no "Grace of God," but only a long and painful reasoning process. It was the result of logical labour rather than of religious élan. The best illustration of his inner process is to be found in two letters he sent to the Countess A.

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Tolstoy in the period of those torments of which he says in the *Confession* that they nearly drove him to suicide. In April, 1876, he wrote :—

“ It was a happiness for me to learn your opinion (if I understood it rightly) according to which conversion rarely occurs instantaneously, but that pains and suffering are on the path to it. It is a happiness for me, because I myself have gone through a long and painful inner labour ; I know that these pains and suffering are the best I have so far experienced in my life and that they must have their reward, if not in the soothing quiet of faith, then at least in the consciousness of the price I paid for them. The theory that God’s Grace descends upon one, in the English Clubs or in an assembly of stock-brokers, I always considered not only as stupid, but also as immoral.

“ You say you do not know in what I myself believe. Strange and terrible to say : I believe in nothing, in nothing that is taught by religion, and at the same time I not only hate, I despise unbelief. I don’t see how one can live, and even more how one can die without belief.

“ I am gradually constructing my own beliefs, yet although they are firm, they are not very clear and not very consoling. When the reason asks they answer well ; but when the heart

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suffers and demands an answer, it receives from them neither support nor consolation. The demands of my reason and the answers given by the Christian religion could be compared with two hands which want to join but whose fingers prevent them from folding. I am craving for it, but the more I endeavour the worse it goes. Yet I know that this is possible, that they are made for each other."

And in February, 1877, Tolstoy is even more outspoken. He bluntly acknowledges that religion is for him simply "the question of a man who is drowning and seeks something to clutch to in order to avoid the inevitable ruin which he foresees with all his soul. During the last two years," he continues, "religion seemed to me a possibility of salvation. That is why there is no room for *fausse honte* in this question. And it happens that just when I have seized this saving board it seems to me that I am going, together with it, to the bottom ; while *je surnage* more or less in so far as I do not clutch at it. If you ask me what it is that prevents me from floating on the surface with the board I shall not tell you because I am afraid of disturbing your faith, and I know that faith is the greatest boon. I also know that you will smile at the idea that my doubts could disturb you ; however, it is

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important not to know which of us reasons better, but what one ought to do to save oneself from drowning. This is why I will not talk to you about them ; on the contrary, I shall be glad for you and for all those who are floating in the little boat that does not carry me.

“ I have a good friend, a savant, Strakhov, one of the best men I know. We agree considerably in our ideas about religion, and both of us are convinced that philosophy does not give anything, that *without religion one cannot live, and yet we cannot believe.*

“ This year, we are going together to the Optin Monastery. There I will say to the monks all the reasons why I cannot believe.”

II

The final result of this inner contest was that Tolstoy's rationalistic double took the direction prompted by his *daimonion*, but in such a way as to give sanction only to those elements of which the former approved. Urged by his ruling instinct, Tolstoy first of all embraced the Christian truth of the broad peasant masses ; yet he could not help sifting it through his own logic, in order to correct it in the name of reason, to

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strip it of all its mystical elements, retaining only its moral skeleton.

“Christianity presents itself to the people in the garb of a supernatural religion,” he says, “while in it there is nothing mysterious, mystical or super-natural ; there is in it only a doctrine of life corresponding to that degree of material development, that stage of growth, in which humanity is at present.”

“The business of religion is like geometry,” he says in a private letter. “Religion is not composed of a conglomerate of words which may well act upon people ; religion is composed of simple, apparent, clear, indubitable moral truths, which are separated from the chaos of false and deceptive judgments ; and such are the truths of Christ. . . . Christ’s whole teaching is nothing but what a man must do ; he must not mutter, ‘ Lord, Lord ! ’ but do His commandments.”

The usual result of such an attitude towards religion is a confusion, or even a complete identification of religion with morality. This confusion became in fact the only outlet for Tolstoy. He began to look upon religion as a reasonable scaffolding whose sole function it was to support those “rules of conduct” which can secure the salvation of man, and above

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all, the salvation of Tolstoy himself. Hence his incessant endeavour to define everything in words and to purge religion of all those elements that go beyond our sober logical definitions and understanding. As he says, "the clearing up by each man of all religious truth accessible to him, and its expression in words (for expression in words in one sure sign of complete clearness of thought) is one of the chief and most holy duties of man."

In this clearing up Tolstoy either rejects or ignores everything that cannot be defined by practical logical formulæ, to which he finally sacrifices all metaphysics as something futile. To put it in his own words, "there are so many direct, imperative, ever-present, and vastly important affairs for a disciple of Christ, that he has no time to busy himself with metaphysics . . . I am a labourer, and He is the Master."

Tolstoy goes so far in his moralising rationalism as to place (in *What To Do ?*) the Christian mystics and gnostics on an equality with the Greek sophists. In short, he takes the Sermon on the Mount, reduces it to five "reasonable" commandments (1, Do not be angry ; 2, Do not commit adultery ; 3, Do not take oaths ; 4, Do not resist evil ; 5, Be no man's enemy), proclaims them as the true essence of Christianity, and

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rejects everything else as fictitious, and therefore superfluous and harmful. These five rules, which he identifies with the Christian religion as a whole, represent for him the unshakable Categorical Imperative—"something given in advance which stands quite firmly, and independently of philosophy and is in no need of fictitious supports which are put under it," as he states in his essay, *Religion and Morality*.

In this spirit he corrects the whole of the Gospel, allowing Christ to utter only those words with which he himself agrees. He sees in Christ only a moral preacher who reduced (for practical purposes) the fulfilment of 613 Jewish commandments to "five commandments, which are reasonable, beneficent, carry in themselves their meaning and justification, and embrace the whole life of man." Not seeing Christ Himself behind the rules, Tolstoy does not see, or is indifferent to, the mystical essence of Christianity. "I have no predilection whatever for Christianity," he writes in 1909 to the Polish painter, Jan Styka. "If I have been particularly interested in the doctrine of Jesus, it is : Firstly, because I was born in that religion, and have lived among Christians ; secondly, because I have found a great spiritual joy in freeing the

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doctrine in its purity from the astounding falsifications wrought by the Churches."

He records in *Confession* this typical illustration of his purifying proceeding: "During Church service I attended to every word, and gave them a meaning whenever I could. In the Mass the most important words for me were: 'Let us love one another in conformity.' The further words, 'In unity we believe, in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost,' I passed by, because I could not understand them." This means that he tried to purify Christianity by dismissing with contempt, at the very outset, one of its profoundest esoteric premises—more, the very basis on which it stands. In *The Kingdom of God is Within You* he even emphasises that "if a man sincerely believes the Sermon on the Mount, the Nicene creed must inevitably lose all its meaning for him; but if a man accepts the Nicene creed, then he will find no use for the Sermon on the Mount."

In his endeavour to weed out all that is beneath logic, Tolstoy invariably crushes also those elements which are above it. Taking all religious symbols literally (Baptism, the Second Advent, the Resurrection of the Flesh, etc.), his reason naturally does not accept them. And since he, Tolstoy, cannot accept them,

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then—in his opinion—Christ Himself could never have accepted or uttered them. Hence he re-interprets and corrects the sayings of Christ with an almost childish self-confidence. He calmly uttered even a phrase such as this : “ I am so strongly convinced that that which for me is a truth, is a truth for all men, that the question as to when and as to what people will arrive at does not interest me.”

This profound. artist, whose intuition penetrates the mystery of every trifle in God’s world, loses all his clairvoyance when trying to build up his dry and sober Christianity. He condescends even to such petty scoffing at Christian symbols as his description of the (Orthodox) Divine Service in *Resurrection*, which is worth quoting :—

“ The service began. It consisted of the following. The priest, having dressed himself up in a strange and very inconvenient garb of gold cloth, cut and arranged little bits of bread on a saucer and then put most of them into a cup with wine, repeating at the same time different names and prayers. . . . Besides this, several verses from the Acts of Apostles were read by the deacon in a peculiarly strained voice, which made it impossible to understand what he read, and then the priest himself read

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very distinctly a part of St. Mark's Gospel, in which it is told how Christ, having risen from the dead, before flying up to heaven to sit down at His Father's right hand, first showed himself to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had driven seven devils, and then to eleven of His disciples, and how He ordered them to preach the Gospel to the whole world, declaring that he who believed and was baptised should be saved, and should, besides, drive out devils and cure people by laying hands on them, should talk in strange tongues, should handle serpents, and if he drank poison should not die but remain well.

"The essence of the service consisted in the supposition that the bits of bread cut up by the priest and put into the wine, when manipulated and prayed over in a certain way turned into the flesh and blood of God.

"These manipulations consisted in the priest, hampered by the gold cloth sack he had on, regularly lifting and holding up his arms, and then sinking to his knees and kissing the table and all that was on it ; but chiefly in his taking a cloth by two of its corners and waving it rhythmically and softly over the silver saucer and the golden cup. It was supposed that at this point the bread and wine turned into flesh and

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blood : therefore this part of the service was performed with the utmost solemnity.

“ ‘ Now, to the blessed, most pure, and most holy Mother of God,’ the priest cried from behind the golden partition which divided part of the church from the rest. And the choir began to sing solemnly that it was very right to glorify the Virgin Mary, who had borne Christ without losing her virginity, and was therefore worthy of greater honour than some kind of cherubim, and greater glory than some kind of seraphim. After this the transformation was considered accomplished, and the priest having taken the napkin off the saucer, cut the middle piece of bread in four, and put it first into the wine and then into his mouth. He was supposed to have eaten a piece of God’s flesh and swallowed a little of His blood. Then the priest drew a curtain, opened the middle door in the partition, and taking the gold cup in his hands, came out of the door inviting those who wished to do so also to come and have some of God’s flesh and blood contained in the cup. A few children appeared to wish to.

“After having asked the children their names, the priest carefully took a bit of bread soaked in wine out of the cup with a spoon and pushed it deep into the mouth of a child. This he did

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to each child in turn ; and the deacon, while wiping the children's mouths, sang in a merry voice that the children were eating God's flesh and drinking God's blood. After this the priest carried the cup back behind the partition and there drank all the remaining blood and ate up the remaining pieces of God's flesh, and after having carefully sucked his moustache and wiped his mouth and the cup, he stepped briskly from behind the partition, the thin soles of his calf-skin boots creaking."

III

Nietzsche's open blasphemies—those of a fettered and therefore revengeful giant—are feeble in comparison with this "reasonable" chuckle of the Christian Tolstoy. Yet, in so far as his violent attacks on the Church are concerned, Tolstoy is usually in the right. Who can deny the tragic truth that the official Christian Church in its actual form resembles a putrefying corpse which may be galvanised but not resurrected ? Tolstoy has done a great service in pointing out so recklessly the weaknesses and contradictions of the existing Churches ; but in attacking them he was far from Dostoevsky's

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or Solovyev's vision of a Universal Church on a new plane of human consciousness—the Church of the mystical “Second Advent.”

What Tolstoy really seems to be aiming at is to replace even the need of a Church by his own “Christianity,” behind whose external reasonableness one can easily detect the Buddhist resignation. If Tolstoy speaks of the “divine life-conception,” of love, of the Kingdom of God, of God's will, he means either his own Nirvana, or the stunted and re-made Sermon on the Mount. At his best he cleverly blends the two. Wherever one dives deep enough beneath his moralising eloquence one usually finds not Christ, but “religious reverence” of nothingness.

A fair example of what has been said is Tolstoy's attitude towards the immortality of the Soul. While Dostoevsky with his dynamic religious temperament was driven nearly mad by the mere possibility of personal extinction after death, the converted Tolstoy accepts it with a Buddhistic placidity.¹ He even welcomes it as a boon which may rid us from the burden of our self for ever and ever.

“Belief in personal immortality always seems

¹ Later on he sometimes tried to modify this view; yet he never seemed to have overcome his basic conception.

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to me a misunderstanding," he said (in 1896), to the pianist Goldenweiser. And in the same spirit he argues in *What I Believe* : " Strange as it may appear, it cannot be said that belief in a future personal life is not a very low and gross conception (based on a confusion of sleep with death) and one natural to all savage tribes ; and that the Hebrew doctrine, not to speak of the Christian doctrine, stood immeasurably above it. We are convinced that this superstition is something very elevated, and seriously try to prove the superiority of our teaching to other doctrines by the fact that we hold this superstition, while others, such as Chinese and Hindoos, do not hold it. . . .

" Nowhere in the Old Testament is it said," he goes on, " that God breathed into man an *immortal soul*, or that the first man before he sinned was immortal. God created man, as is told in the first story in the book of Genesis (ch. i. 26) just as He created the animals, of the male and female gender : and He ordered them to be fruitful and multiply in just the same way. Just as it is not said of the animals that they are immortal so it is not said of man. In the following chapters it is plainly said that God drove man out of paradise and warded him off from the way to the tree of Life ; so that man did not

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eat of the fruit of the tree of Life, and did not obtain *chayi-olam*—that is to say ‘life for ever’—but remained mortal.

“The chief distinction between our understanding of human life and that of the Jews consists in this, that according to our understanding our mortal life, transmitted from generation to generation, is not real life but a fallen life, for some reason temporarily spoilt ; but in the Jewish conception this life is the most real, it is the highest good given to man on condition that he fulfils the will of God. From our point of view, the transmission of that fallen life from generation to generation is the continuation of a curse. From the point of view of the Jews, it is the highest blessing attainable by man, and to be reached only by fulfilling God’s will.

“Christ, in contradistinction to temporal, private personal life, teaches that eternal life, which, in Deuteronomy, God promised to Israel ; only with this difference, that, according to the Jewish conception, eternal life endured only in the chosen people of Israel ; while, by Christ’s teaching, eternal life continues in the Son of Man, and what is needed to preserve it is the observance of the laws of Christ, which express God’s will for the whole of humanity. Christ

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contrasts with personal life, not a life beyond the grave, but *common life bound up with the past, present and the future life*¹ of the whole of humanity, the life of the Son of Man. . . . Moses' service of God is a service of the God of one people, while Christ's service of God is a service of God of all mankind."

In plain words, while the Jewish God represented the group-consciousness of a single race, the "Christian" God ought to be enlarged to such limits as to represent the racial group-consciousness of the whole of humanity—depersonalised and returned to the undifferentiated amorphous state of universal peace and quiet, the quiet of Nirvana, of death. For, as Tolstoy says further, "the whole teaching of Christ is that his disciples, having understood the illusory nature of personal life, should renounce it and transfer it into the life of the whole of humanity ; the life of the Son of Man. The teaching of the immortality of the personal soul, on the other hand, does not call for the renunciation of one's personal life, but rivets that personality for ever. . . .

"Any meaning given to a personal life, if it be not based on the renunciation of self for the service of man, humanity, the Son of Man, is a

¹ Italics are mine.

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delusion which flies to pieces at the first contact with reason. That my personal life perishes and that the life of the whole world in the will of the Father does not perish, and that only by merging with it can I possibly be saved, of that I can have no doubt. But this is so little in comparison with those exalted religious beliefs in a future life! Though it be little, it is sure. . . .

“I know that there is no other exit for me or for all those who, together with me, are tormented in this life. I know that for all, and for me, together with them, there is no way of escape except by fulfilling those commands of Christ which offer to all humanity the highest welfare of which I can conceive.

“I am not frightened about whether I shall have more unpleasantness or whether I shall die sooner. This may be terrible to one who does not see how senseless and ruinous is his separate, personal life, and who thinks he will not die. But I know that my life, aiming at personal solitary happiness, is the greatest absurdity, and that at the end of this stupid life there is inevitably nothing but a stupid death. I shall die like every one else, like those who do not fulfil the teaching ; but, both for me and for all, my life and death will have a meaning. My life

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and death will serve the salvation and life of all, and that is what Christ taught."

These passages speak for themselves. Tolstoy's longing for the group-soul is the material out of which a profound religious love of humanity can be born—but only through individualisation, and not apart from it. The impersonal, Nirvanic group-consciousness is and will remain the most dangerous call back to "Nature," in so far as it conceals or even denies the dynamic path of religiosity—that which demands not the annihilation but the utmost expansion of oneself, an expansion which makes one include within one's Ego the whole universe (instead of dissolving in it), feel it, *be* it. This dynamic individualism leads to over-personal love of mankind; while the other "self-less" method arrives at its best at an abstract impersonal love.

There is no need of further proofs that Tolstoy chose, in essence, the easier, that is, the impersonal way. And although he extols the tranquillity and happiness which were given to him, as he says, by his own Christian faith, his diaries show that he knew a passionate will to God rather than God Himself. Under the quiet and simple surface of his message, terrible doubts remained hidden, in spite of all his external self-assurance.

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Eighteen years after his conversion (Oct. 14, 1897) he had the experience recorded below : "Not long ago, in the summer, I felt God for the first time ; that he existed and that I existed in him ; and that the only thing that existed was I in Him; in Him, like a limited thing in an unlimited thing, in Him also like a limited being in which. He existed." And he adds immediately, in brackets, "Horribly bad, unclear. But I felt it clearly and especially keenly for the first time in my life."

But if this was for the *first* time in his life, the question arises, why did he preach with such assurance during the previous eighteen years, about God, His Kingdom, His Law and Will ? Was it because he was an unswerving believer ? Or because he wished to be one ? But let us open his diary of July 17th, 1898—only a few months after his first mystical flash of God: "An inner struggle. *I believe little in God.*¹ I do not rejoice at the examination, but I am burdened by it, admitting in advance that I won't pass. All last night I did not sleep. I rose early and prayed much."

¹ Italics are mine.

However, the more he suffered from inner doubts, from his will to God without God, the more he clung to logical definitions and "rules." They were for him the last barricade against the pains of his inner division, and therefore a tragic necessity. He was obliged to insist on his rational Christianity chiefly because "the whole of Christ's teaching consists in giving the Kingdom of God, that is peace, to man. In the Sermon on the Mount, in the talk of Nicodemus, in his charge to his disciples, and in all his sermons, Christ speaks only of the things that divide men and hinder them from being at peace and entering the Kingdom of God. . . . Men need only trust Christ's teaching, and obey it, and there will be peace on earth; and not such a peace as men devise, temporary, accidental, and partial, but a general peace, inviolable and eternal."

This static peace of Nirvana at which Tolstoy aims is in essence his line of least resistance, the "bottom from which there is no place to fall," and his very preaching of universal love includes a great deal of unconscious selfishness and hedonism. At a moment of perfect frankness

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with himself, the aged Tolstoy identified in his diary his love towards enemies even with spiritual voluptuousness : " Love towards enemies. . . . What happiness when you attain it! There is an exquisite sweetness in this love, even in the foretaste of it. And this sweetness is just in the inverse ratio to the attractiveness of the object of love. Yes, the spiritual voluptuousness of love towards enemies. . . ." But even much earlier his Christianity showed an open utilitarian strain which, after all, was less surprising than it may seem. For the more a religion loses its transcendental *raison d'être* and becomes only a moral system, the more it must and does seek for a mere " practical " justification, however cleverly this be masked by pious labels. To put it roughly, one must abstain from bad actions because they do not pay. When admonishing humanity, in *What I Believe*, to embrace Christ's teaching (in Tolstoyan revision), he lays direct stress on the point that the position of Christ's followers will be better than the position of the followers of the world. " To verify this," he reckons like a book-keeper, " let every one remember all the painful moments of his life, all the physical and spiritual sufferings he has endured and still endures, and ask himself for what has he borne all these misfortunes,

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for the sake of the world's teaching, or for that of Christ's? Let every sincere man remember well his whole life and he will see that never, not once, has he suffered from obeying the teaching of Christ, but that most of the misfortunes of his life have come about because, contrary to his own inclination, he has followed the world's teaching which constrained him. . . .

"Christ does not call us to something worse instead of something better, but, on the contrary, to something better, instead of something worse. He pities people who appeared to him like lost sheep, perishing without a shepherd and *good pasture*.¹ He says that his disciples will be persecuted for his teaching and will have to suffer and to endure worldly persecution with fortitude, but *he does not say that by following His teaching they will suffer more*¹ than by following the world's teaching; on the contrary, he says that those who will follow the teaching of the world will be unhappy and those who follow His teaching will be blessed. Christ does not teach salvation by faith or by asceticism—that is, by a deception of imagination or by voluntarily tormenting oneself in this life; but he teaches life in which, besides *salvation from the loss of*

¹ Italics are mine.

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*personal life,*¹ there will, *here in this world be less of suffering and more of joy than by a personal life.*¹ Christ, revealing his teaching, says to follow it, they will not be more unhappy than before, but, on the contrary, will be happier than those who reject it. He says that there is *true worldly advantage*¹ in not taking thought for the worldly life."

This "worldly advantage" is, of course, not objectionable in itself; it becomes objectionable only when treated as a bait for religion and morality. In Tolstoy's hands it nearly becomes a bait of this kind. It is true that bliss is our aim in life; but that bliss which Christ's religion ought to give us either must be the expression of the highest spiritual heroism, or it is not worth striving after. The essence of Tolstoy's Christianity, on the other hand, is far from being heroic. It would not be difficult to write, on his lines, even a "life of Christ as a materialist"—the idea of which had struck Tolstoy already at the age of thirty-two, during his brother's funeral at Hyères.

¹ Italics are mine.

CHAPTER VI
THE MILLENNIUM

VI

THE MILLENNIUM

I

THE first thing that is likely to impress many readers of Tolstoy's books is the extreme outward simplicity of the author. However, the longer one studies him the more one begins to suspect a great, an almost terrific complexity behind the simple external garb of his phrases and ideas. At last one cannot help feeling that Tolstoy has entrenched himself in his simple theories mainly because he knew too well all the dangers that awaited him outside his "reasonable" trenches; and it is at this point that one becomes more interested in what Tolstoy does not say than in what he says. It is here that one also understands why he clings to "clearly defined" formulae so uncompromisingly that even his frequent extravagances in ideas are due not so much to the irrationality as to an exaggerated rationality of his mind. It is an excess of sober and calculating logic which often drives his own conclusions *ad absurdum*. For, having adopted

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a priori certain premises, he unflinchingly accepts all further deductions, even the extremest ones, however fantastic they might appear. This is what Tolstoy himself says (in the Epilogue to the *Kreutzer Sonata*) on this account : "I was horrified at my own conclusions and wished not to believe them. And, however much these conclusions contradict the whole order of our life, however much they contradict what I previously thought and even expressed, I was obliged to accept them."

Great logical daring may even be welcomed in such cases—welcomed as a boon which gives to our very bias the glamour of heroism. And this bias may often increase in proportion with one's will to *complete* sincerity and with one's fear of inner chaos. In other terms, one is inclined to see exclusively one's own truth not because one is short-sighted, but because one is unconsciously afraid of seeing too much; because one does not want to see too much. Hence the intolerance of all those ideas, facts and factors which might threaten or undermine one's own "firm" convictions. One simplifies everything so as to be able to justify one's principles in the face of reality. And this is what Tolstoy does in his reforming zeal.

His usual proceeding is to approach aspects

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of reality with his own scheme of life, choose some vulnerable point or other, intensify its vulnerability, and then extend it upon the whole in such a way as to be able to attack and reject the whole. While Tolstoy the artist sees things not only with both eyes open, but also with his penetrating "second sight," Tolstoy the thinker and the moralist often seems to look upon the world with one eye only. This eye may be extremely acute at times, but its very acuteness is due to a deliberately limited horizon, *i.e.*, to his peculiar capacity for ignoring everything that disturbs the smoothness of his scheme.

And he knows how to ignore, with a childish naïve face, with such apparent firmness and simplicity, that one is almost afraid of questioning his uncompromising assertions. He was capable of doing this even in cases when such practice might have proved fatal to him: when ill, for instance, he often refused doctors and medicine because, according to his principles, doctors were not only superfluous, but harmful and even criminals. His brother-in-law, C. A. Behrs, records,¹ among others, this typical episode: "Two years before my last visit, Leo Nikolae-vitch hurt his foot. The pain became so intense as to make him for a while delirious. His wife

¹In *Recollections of Tolstoy*. (Heinemann).

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then determined to take upon herself the responsibility of sending for a surgeon. The latter was received by his patient with scant affability, and was roughly told, that he would not have come unless he had hoped to get a good fee. To this the surgeon quietly replied that he wondered the very man who preached love to his neighbour should himself so flagrantly violate the rule of love. In the end, the surgeon was allowed to apply his treatment, and before long the inflammation diminished, and the refractory patient was restored to health. But the Count remained unshaken in his belief; and I remember that, during my last visit, when he was suffering, I advised him to drink Carlsbad waters, whereupon he declared, that no one had ever proved these waters to be of any use either for his illness or any other. Nor could he be persuaded to follow a regular cure."

Tolstoy's attitude towards doctors and cures is identical—*mutatis mutandis*—with his attitude towards other facts and realities. Instead of enlarging his doctrines for the sake of life as a whole, he usually narrows down life to the size of the Procrustean bed of his doctrines. Hence the firmness and, at the same time, the dogmatic one-sidedness of those views which constitute what we might call Tolstoy's sociology.

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II

The sociological views of Tolstoy are entirely based on his main "complex," whether he call it self-renunciation, universal love, or the Kingdom of God. The subliminal psychological impulse that drives him to his own "clearly defined" starting-point is thus irrational; yet deliberately he constructs upon it an ultra-rational and logical theory with regard to human society, to property, to State, to culture, to life as a whole.

Conceiving the meaning of life in general as a tendency to seek bliss and happiness by "holding unconsciously together," *i.e.*, in the pre-individual compactness of humanity where only the collective life-instinct is working, Tolstoy sets out in that direction which promises the maximum of such compactness, or of love, as he calls it. "Life is the activity of the animal personality, subjected to the law of reason," he says in his book, *On Life*. "Reason is that law to which, for its own happiness, the animal personality of man must be rendered subservient. The animal personality inclines to happiness, reason demonstrates to man the delusiveness of personal happiness, and leaves but one path.

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Activity along this path is love. The animal personality of man demands happiness, rational consciousness shows man the misery of all beings who contend with each other, demonstrates to him that there can be no happiness for his animal individual, shows him that the only happiness possible to him is one in which there shall be no contest with other beings, no cessation of happiness, no satiety, in which there shall be no prevision or fear of death. . . ."

Making an arbitrary (and in many respects fatal) confusion between the animal self and the individual, Tolstoy tries to interpret the whole history of humanity as a progress along the path of de-personalisation. The evolution of humanity is thus divided, according to him, into three periods which correspond to three grades of happiness. The first and the lowest degree is the individual or the animal state with that selfish kind of happiness which is attained at the expense of other fellow-beings. The second degree is the so-called social state of human consciousness, in which the individual sacrifices his own well-being to that of some social group or other, say, the well-being of family, clan, tribe, State, or nation. The third degree, however, consists in absolute selflessness: one's

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personal Ego dissolves in the whole of humanity; even more—it annihilates itself in a pantheistic fusion with the whole Creation. This depersonalising, Nirvanic kind of religiosity Tolstoy proclaims as the divine state of human consciousness, as the Kingdom of God. The first degree forms (in Tolstoy's opinion) the life-conception of a savage, the second that of a Pagan, the third that of a true Christian.

As Tolstoy points out (in his most important book on the subject, *The Kingdom of God is Within You*), the only reasonable evolution of man consists in self-annihilation for the sake of the abstract unindividual whole. According to him, even the multifarious Pagan systems of life “are based upon the fundamental idea of the insignificance of the individual, and the assurance that the meaning of life is to be sought and found only in humanity, taken in its broadest sense.” And the man who possesses the third, the divine life-conception neither looks upon life as centred in his own personality nor in the family, or nation as such, but only in that static Kingdom of God which may be defined as Christianity from the other end, *i.e.*, Nirvana. He believes and prophesies that the so-called Pagan forces will soon yield to the growing “Christian” life-conception, and then perfect

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happiness and tranquillity will be established on earth. "The time will come, and it is already near at hand, when the Christian foundations of life,—equality, brotherly love, community of goods, non-resistance of evil by violence,—will seem as natural and simple as the foundations of family, social, and state life appear to us at the present time.

"There can be no retrogression of humanity. Men have outgrown the lower life-conception of the family and the State, and must press forward to embrace the next higher conception, as they have already begun to do. . . .

"In spite of the necessity for a change of life, acknowledged and proclaimed by our religious guides and admitted by the wisest men; in spite of the religious respect entertained for these guides, the majority of men continue to be influenced in life, now additionally complicated, by their former views. It is as if the father of a family, knowing well enough how to conduct himself properly, should through force of habit or thoughtlessness continue to live as if he were still a child.

"At this very moment we are experiencing one of these transitions. Humanity has outgrown its social, its civic age, and has entered upon a new epoch. *It knows the doctrine that*

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*must underlie the foundations of life*¹ in this new epoch; but, yielding to inertia, it still clings to its former habits. From this inconsistency between the theory of life and its practice follow a series of contradictions and sufferings that embitter man's life and compel him to make a change.

"One needs but to compare the practice of life with its theory to be horrified at the extraordinary contradictions between the conditions of life and our inner consciousness.

"Man's whole life is a continual contradiction of what he knows to be his duty. This contradiction prevails in every department of life, in the economical, the political, and the international. As though his intelligence were forgotten and his faith temporarily eclipsed,—for he must have faith, else would his life have no permanence,—he acts in direct opposition to the dictates of his conscience and his common-sense.

"In our economic and international relations we are guided by the fundamental principles of bygone ages,—principles quite contradictory to our mental attitude and the conditions of our present life."

Tolstoy opened a relentless campaign against

¹ Italics are mine.

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what he calls the fundamental principles of bygone ages—in the name of “our new mental attitude.” In this campaign he does not spare either friend or foe as long as he confines himself to criticism alone. The senselessness of modern wars, the patriotic hysteria of European jingoes, the madness of capitalistic politics, the religious persecutions in Russia, the unjust distribution of land, the narrow self-complacency of modern science, the prostitution of art and religion—all find an inexorable judge in Tolstoy. But in offering various measures towards improvement, he generalises his own mental attitude; he takes it for granted that his own personal views and remedies are those of all advanced humanity and that it even cannot be otherwise. So he always rejects and affirms as one who speaks for many. He rejects eventually the entire “general tendency” of our age, that is, all our institutions, laws and forms of life, on the simple ground that they foster division among humanity and therefore prevent it from reaching what he calls the Kingdom of God.

The first and the greatest obstacle on this path is—in Tolstoy’s opinion—the State. He cannot and does not see in it anything but organised violence whose only aim is to divide and disintegrate humanity—through laws, authorities,

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money and private property. Therefore he loses no opportunity of attacking it. His *Kingdom of God is Within You* may be instanced as a typical and, in its own way, strong specimen of such attacks. This is how he defines in it the existing governments and the State itself:—

“Nowadays every government, the despotic as well as the most liberal, has become what Herzen so cleverly termed a Genghis Khan with a telegraphic equipment, that is, with an organisation of violence, having for basis nothing less than the most brutal tyranny, and converting all the means invented by science for the inter-communication and peaceful activities of free and equal men, to its own tyrannous and oppressive ends.

“The existing governments and the ruling classes no longer care to present even the semblance of justice, but rely, thanks to scientific progress, on an organisation so ingenuous that it is able to enclose all men within a circle of violence through which it is impossible to break. This circle is made up of four expedients, each connected with and supporting the other like the rings of a chain.

“The first and the oldest expedient is intimidation. It consists in representing the actual organisation of the State, whether it be that of a

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liberal republic or of an arbitrary despotism, as something sacred and immutable, which therefore punishes by the most cruel penalties any attempt at revolution. The second expedient is bribery. This consists in taking the property of the labouring classes by means of taxation and distributing it among the officials, who in consideration of this, are bound to maintain and increase the bondage of the people. The third expedient I can call by no other name than hypnotism. It consists in retarding the spiritual development of men, and by means of various suggestions influencing them to cling to the theory of life, which mankind has already left behind, and upon which rests the foundation of governmental authority. The fourth expedient consists in this: certain individuals are selected from among the mass of enslaved and stupefied beings; and these, after having been subjected to a still more vigorous process of brutalisation, are made the passive instruments of the cruelties and brutalities indispensable to the government.

“Intimidation, bribery, and hypnotism force men to become soldiers; soldiers give power and make it possible to execute and to rob mankind (with the aid of bribed officials), as well as to hypnotise and to recruit men who are in their

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turn to become soldiers. The circle is complete, and there is no possibility of escape from it."

The State thus becomes for Tolstoy an organised collection of vices which divide man from man, and promote every kind of misery on earth, without having a single point to their credit. While Nietzsche hated and despised the modern State because it does not sufficiently differentiate and individualise, Tolstoy hated it with a still greater *verve* precisely because it is founded on that principle of functional and social differentiation which is entirely incompatible with his own Christian teaching. Being unable to accept the possibility of a unity through multiplicity, he must *a priori* reject the very principle of organisation whether this be the organisation of State, of Society, or of the Church. Apart from the State, Tolstoy was particularly aggressive with regard to the Christian Church. Even if he had detected no other flaws in it, the very fact that the Church is an organisation would have been enough to evoke Tolstoy's wrath and hatred. In his own words, "every church, as a church, has always been, and always must be, an institution not only foreign, but absolutely hostile to the doctrine of Christ. It is not without reason that all so-called Christian sects believe the Church to be the Scarlet Woman

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prophesied by the Revelation; it is not without reason that the history of the Church is the history of cruelties and horror."

III

Denying all state-machinery as such, Tolstoy must needs deny also those social forms and elements which are its results, however inevitable and necessary they might appear to us. And since the whole of our civilisation has grown up owing to that very machinery, Tolstoy's proposal is to make of it a *tabula rasa*. He is ready to wipe out the whole system of our life, without regard to the organic laws of social evolution. Although he himself has constructed in *War and Peace* a whole philosophy of history on the idea that historical events develop owing to the unconscious activities of masses and that any attempt to give them a conscious direction is doomed to be stricken with barrenness, he himself now deliberately tries to impose upon humanity his own theory of life—with the aim of stopping history and changing its course.

Contrary to all historical sense and all inner laws of evolution, Tolstoy believes that a change

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of views is sufficient to produce the corresponding changes in the organic forms of life. Hence his continuous endeavour to alter men's minds by imbuing them with his own theories, which have but one aim: the complete uniformity of human society based on that "universal love" which would abolish all differences between man and man, all division of labour even, all property, all social differentiation whatever. In order that it should be easier for every one to sacrifice his own self to the whole, external conditions must be established which would render unprofitable or even impossible any personal ambition, any tendency towards division. This could in part be achieved by effacing the line between manual and mental work in such a way that every one would be compelled to earn his food by tilling the ground with his own hands—an occupation in which Tolstoy sees the very law of life.

"Only one thing is needed," he writes (in *What To Do?*), "instead of all these extremely complicated devices for pleasure, for comfort, and for medical and hygienic preparations, intended to save people from their spiritual and bodily ailments, which swallowed up so much labour,—to fulfil the law of life; to do that which is proper not only to man, but to the animal ;

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to fire off the charge of energy taken in the shape of food, by muscular exertion; to speak in plain language, to earn one's bread. Those who do not work should not eat, or they should earn as much as they have eaten." And again (in *Confession*): "A bird is so made that it must fly, collect food, and build a nest, and when I see that a bird does this, I have a pleasure in its joy. A goat, a hare and a wolf are so made that they must feed themselves, and must breed and feed their family, and when they do so, I feel firmly assured that they are happy and that their life is a reasonable one. Then what should a man do? He, too, should produce his living as the animals do, but with this difference, that *he will perish if he does it alone*;¹ he must obtain it not for himself but for all. And when he does that I have a firm assurance that he is happy and that his life is reasonable."

Knowing that civilisation, with all its external benefits, is bound to foster a growing difference between individuals and classes, Tolstoy has such an ingrained aversion to it that he does not believe it can be improved or humanised, or that a just balance between the diverging elements of human society can be established. He repudiates it without compromise or reserve. He

¹ Italics are mine.

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rejects with the same vehemence, and for the same reasons, all those conveniences the production of which demands exploitation or division of mankind. "Electric lights and telephones and exhibitions are excellent," he says in *The Slavery of Our Time*, "and so are all the pleasure-gardens with concerts and performances, and all the cigars, and match-boxes, and braces, and motor-cars—but may they all go to perdition, and not they alone but the railways, and all the factory-made chintz-stuffs and clothes in the world, if to produce them it is necessary that 99 per cent. of the people should remain in slavery and perish by thousands in factories needed for the production of these articles. If in order that London or Petersburg should be lighted by electricity, or in order to construct exhibition buildings, or in order that there may be beautiful paints, or in order to weave beautiful stuffs quickly and abundantly, it is necessary that even a very few lives should be destroyed, or ruined, or shortened—and statistics show us how many are destroyed—let London and Petersburg rather be lit by gas, or oil, let there rather be no exhibitions, no paints, no materials—only let there be no slavery and destruction of human lives resulting from it. Truly enlightened people will always agree to go back

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to riding on horses and using pack-horses, or even to tilling the earth with sticks and with their own hands, rather than to travel on railways which regularly every year crush a number of people. The motto for truly enlightened people is not *fiat cultura, pereat justitia*, but *fiat justitia, pereat cultura*."

In short, as long as civilisation exists, no justice in Tolstoy's sense is possible because the very essence of civilisation is based on social and individual differentiation. The justice Tolstoy aims at is tantamount to a complete social and cultural levelling of mankind—near the line of zero. The smallest attempt at something personal is already the beginning of separation, and leads to the difference of interests, wills, ambitions—to that individual self-assertion in which Tolstoy sees the main evil of human existence. In other words, injustice begins with the individual self as such and grows with it. Abolish the human Ego for the sake of the "aggregate of personalities," and the justice of perfect equality and brotherhood will reign on earth. This is the only path to general happiness Tolstoy can think of. Making further logical conclusions, he ultimately denounces even education and habits of cleanliness as a danger, since they also are elements of division among men.

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“To-day cleanliness consists in changing your shirt once a day,” Tolstoy says in *What To Do?* “to-morrow in changing it twice a day. To-day the footman’s hands must be clean; to-morrow he must wear gloves, and in his clean gloves he must present a letter on a clean salver. And there are no limits to this cleanliness, which is useless to everybody, and objectless, except *for the purpose of separating oneself from others*, and of rendering impossible all intercourse with them, when this cleanliness is attained by the labour of others. Moreover, when I studied the subject, I became convinced that even what is commonly called education is the very same thing. . . . *Education consists of those forms and acquirements which are calculated to separate a man from his fellows.*¹ And its object is identical with that of cleanliness,—to seclude us from the herd of the poor. . . .”

In the same way Tolstoy must and does go against the mere idea of any institution, law, or authority even if they existed for good purposes. The only law and authority he recognises is his own Categorical Imperative, that is, the instinct which urges him to dissolve in amorphous humanity, and which he boldly identifies with

¹ Italics are mine

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God's law and God's will. . . . "A man needs but to realise that the object of his life is the fulfilment of God's law; then the pre-eminence of that law, claiming as it does his entire allegiance, will of necessity invalidate the authority and restrictions of all human laws," he says in *The Kingdom of God is Within You*. "A Christian, therefore, who submits to the inner, the divine law, is not only unable to execute the biddings of the outward law when they are at variance with his consciousness of God's law of love, as in the case of the demands made upon him by the government; but he cannot acknowledge the obligation of obeying any individual whomsoever, cannot acknowledge himself to be what is called a subject. . . . The Christian's only guide must be the indwelling element, subject neither to *restrictions* nor to *control*."

Thus we reach the very root of Tolstoy's anarchism. Its paradoxical feature is that it does not rest on any individualistic premises, but on their extremest antithesis. Hence, instead of being revolutionary, it is and must be passive. It rejects every active struggle or resistance, even the active resistance of evil, on the ground that evil produces evil (through reaction), thereby increasing the already existing violence

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and division. This is why Tolstoy, on the one hand, absolutely denies the State, and on the other disapproves of those active socialists and anarchists who wish to abolish the State by means of revolution. He contends, and quite logically, in *The Kingdom of God*, that if "socialists and communists believe that the possession of individual capital is a pernicious influence in society, and anarchists regard government itself as an evil, there are, on the other hand, monarchists, conservatives and liberals who look upon the social and communal state as an evil order of society, no less than anarchy itself; and all these parties have nothing better to offer by way of reconciling mankind than violence. Thus, whichever party gains the upper hand, it will be forced, in order to introduce and maintain its own system, not only to avail itself of all former methods of violence, but to invent new ones as well. It simply means a change of slavery with new victims and new organisation; but the violence will remain, may increase, because human hatred, intensified by the struggle, will devise new means for reducing the conquered to subjection. This has always been the result of every revolution and violent overthrow of government. Each struggle serves but to increase the power of

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those in authority at the time to enslave their fellow-men."

The quiet method which Tolstoy proposes is much simpler: he advocates first of all the change of our theoretical attitude towards authorities as such, intimating that it is enough to *understand* the harm and immorality of the State in order to turn one's back on it and have done with governments for ever. "As soon as people clearly understand that, they will naturally cease to give the governments soldiers and money. And as soon as a majority of people ceases to do this, the fraud which enslaves people will be abolished. Only in this way can people be freed from slavery."

But what are we to do as long as the State has the power in its hands? Tolstoy bids us to ignore and resist it only passively. It is here that his curious (although not original) theory of non-resistance of evil comes into its own.

This doctrine, which forms one of Tolstoy's most important principles, has puzzled many readers and students of his books. Yet, it is enough to go back to the *psychological* origin of Tolstoy's theories in order to realise that non-resistance is and must be the inevitable outcome of his fear of individualisation and division. Every act of resistance on our part—even if

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this be the resistance of evil—is in essence an act of individual self-assertion. As this act is necessarily directed against other fellow-beings it intensifies their own aggressiveness, increasing thereby violence and division among men. One must love one's enemies to such an extent as to let them do whatever they like. Even if they wish to kill us, we must passively sacrifice ourselves to this conception of love without raising a finger in self-defence. For if the self as such has no right to exist, we have no right to defend this self.

Owing to his logical ruthlessness, Tolstoy forbids even resistance against raving drunkards or madmen. Thus in a letter about Adin Ballou's rival theory of non-resistance he writes (1889), "The comments that I wish to make on Mr. Ballou's explanation of the doctrine are: First, that I cannot agree with the concession he makes for employing violence against drunkards and insane people. The Master made no concessions, and we can make none. We must try, as Mr. Ballou put it, to make impossible the existence of such people, but if they do exist we must use all possible means, and sacrifice ourselves, but not employ violence. A true Christian will always prefer to be killed by a madman, than deprive him of his liberty."

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It goes without saying that this theory stumbles at every step in practice. Tolstoy knows this, but measuring practice by theory, he again consoles himself with the idea that theoretical persuasion may be more effective than any "violent" procedure. The more so because in a society as he conceives it no individual property can exist, and this fact alone does away with many pretexts for personal contests and quarrels. Tolstoy solves the Gordian knot, cutting it in this manner: "Make a spoon and eat with it, and that, too, as long as another person does not need it,—that is clear. . . . The question is difficult because I have made a crutch for my lame fellow, and the drunkard takes it to break the door with it. The drunkard has to be asked to give up the crutch and it is unquestionable that, the more men there are who will ask, the more certainly will the crutch remain with him who needs it."

The pious naïveté of the solution is evident. Yet the entire *practical* Tolstoyanism stands or falls with it. For suppose the drunkard is obstinate enough not to give the crutch at the application of him who needs it, is force allowed or no? Moreover, the drunkard, if he be still sober enough, may go to such limits as to take the hats, coats and boots of those who are trying

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to persuade him to act on Tolstoy's lines. According to orthodox Tolstoyanism, any resistance by force on their part would be immoral. And so, unless all men were either equally "converted" and perfect, or equally amorphic (*i.e.*, so little individualised as to be entirely indifferent to private property), the theory of non-resistance would naturally generate the most unscrupulous kind of exploitation and violence—provided these evil instincts were not tempered by the State and various, however imperfect and even stupid, civic institutions.

Civilisation is too terrible a thing to be solved in the simple manner of Tolstoy. He assures us that whatever may take place when violence, the State and civilisation have been abolished—the "unknown future"—can be no worse than the present, and therefore we need not fear it; but, with all his proposals, Tolstoy again and again confuses two entirely different stages, the pre-civic (*i.e.*, amorphic) and the post-civic stage of human development, in such a way that while his reasoning seems to point to the latter, his instincts and tendencies remain exclusively on the plane of the amorphic stage. His Nirvana comes out in the garb of pious Nihilism—under the auspices of the "revised" Sermon on the Mount. The Millennium Tolstoy offers us

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at last as an alternative to our active culture and civilisation is fairly well defined in these words (quoted from one of his letters): "There is but one legitimate life,—to receive alms, for Christ's sake, from him who gives, whoever it may be, and to give his labour to anybody without casting his accounts, but only feeling his guilt, constantly wishing to give more than he takes, assuming life to consist in his—this is the only legitimate form of life."

IV

It is well known that Tolstoy himself did his best to live as much as possible according to his principles, that is, to simplify his life. For this endeavour he is sometimes compared even to St. Francis—a comparison which is not quite convincing. There may be some small external resemblance between the two, yet inwardly it is difficult to imagine more complete psychological and spiritual contrasts than Tolstoy and St. Francis.

In the conversion of St. Francis we feel the spontaneity and the inward élan of his entire being; in that of Tolstoy chiefly the moral principles and the moral will rebelling against

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the rest of his self. While St. Francis, as if by a miracle, achieved a complete harmony of his personality, Tolstoy only shifted the centre of gravity from one part of his divided self to another, thereby even increasing the tension of self-division. It is notable that St. Francis became a great artist—a “troubadour of God”—in word and life only after his conversion and because of it; Tolstoy, on the other hand, did everything he could in order to suppress the artist in himself. Instead of the childlike smile and bubbling, overflowing love of St. Francis for all God’s creatures, the Tolstoy of the second period loved more on principle than in reality—loved with the knitted eyebrows and the stern look of a Puritan who is mainly concerned with the salvation of his own soul.

Apart from all this, Tolstoy was too complex to become a saint, even if he had wished it. It is also true that his character was often weaker than his principles. Or better, the

¹ Mr. Aylmer Maude relates that in 1887, Tolstoy, tortured by the contradictions of his life, left his wife the evening before she gave birth to her youngest daughter, Alexandra, because he disapproved of his living in luxury. “Soon the birth pangs began, and they were long continued. The Countess sat or lay weeping in the garden refusing to go to her room; and at five o’clock in the morning, when she heard her husband had returned, she went to him in his study, and asked what she had done to be so punished: ‘My fault is only that I have not changed, while you have!’ Tolstoy sat gloomy and morose and did not console her. The struggle in his own soul was more important to him than life or death.”

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logic of actuality was stronger than the logic of his theories, however genuine they might have been in so far as he himself was concerned. Thus in 1894 he made over to his wife all property belonging to him personally, yet he continued to live on his former estate in involuntary comfort and even luxury. He was perfectly aware of this and similar inconsistencies, and his diaries show that he suffered from them. "If I had heard of myself as an outsider—of a man living in luxury, wringing all he can out of the peasants, locking them up in prison, while preaching and professing Christianity and giving away coppers, and for all his loathsome actions sheltering himself behind his dear wife, I should not hesitate to call him a blackguard," he writes on July 2, 1908. "And this is just what I need that I may be set free from the praises of men and live for my soul."¹

This discrepancy between his theories and his practice gradually led to many misunder-

¹ It may be of interest to point out that in his brighter moments Tolstoy was capable of ridiculing his own principles and reformatory efforts, as we may see from this humorous self-characteristic, written by him for the "Letterbox," in which Tolstoy, his children, and other members of the family made (anonymously) fun of each other: "*Bulletin of the Patients at Yasnaya Polyana Lunatic Asylum*. No 1: Sanguine complexion. One of the harmless sort. The patient is subject to the mania known to German lunatic doctors as *Weltverbesserungswahn*. The patient's hallucination consists in thinking that you can change other people's lives by words. *General symptoms*: discontent with all the existing order of

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standings with his wife. As a good and wise mother, the Countess Tolstoy was much more concerned about the concrete future of her numerous children than about the social principles of her less practical husband. So she bravely took the entire burden of management and the care of the family upon her own shoulders. The fact that she resisted her husband's theories, in so far as the welfare of her own family was concerned, proves only that she had a strong sense of motherly responsibility as well as the courage to face reality as it is. "I did not know how to live with such views; I was alarmed, frightened, grieved," she defends herself in her Autobiography. "But with nine children I could not, like a weather-cock, turn in the ever-changing direction of my husband's spiritual going away. With him it was a passionate, sincere seeking; with me it would have been a silly imitation, positively harmful to the family. . . . If I had given away all my fortune at my husband's desire (I don't know to whom), if I

things, condemnation of every one except himself, and irritable garrulity quite irrespective of his audience; frequent transitions from fury and irritability to an unnatural tearful sentimentality *Special symptoms* busying himself with unsuitable occupations, such as cleaning and making boots, mowing hay, etc. Treatment complete indifference of all surrounding the patient to what he says, occupations to use up all his energy," etc. Recorded by Tolstoy's son, Ilya, in his *Reminiscences of Tolstoy*, published by Chapman & Hall.

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had been left in poverty with nine children, I should have to work for the family—to feed, to do sewing for, wash, bring up my children without education. Leo Nikolaevitch, by vocation and inclination, could have done nothing else but write ! . . .”

So the Countess, or better, the wife and the mother. At all events, she is not in the least to blame for not having made herself, her husband and her children voluntary beggars with the sole object that there should be no incongruity between Tolstoy's life and Tolstoy's theories—however much Tolstoy himself and his followers might have blamed her for that.

Tolstoy, on the other hand, looked upon the whole matter not from the standpoint of actual life, but only from that of his “rules”; an attitude which only increased his discontent, his irritability, as well as the estrangement and tension between him and the Countess. The final stage of this tension may be sufficiently illustrated by the following lines from his diary (July 21, 1909): “Last night Sonya (his wife) was weak and irritable. I woke up feeling weak, I was awakened. Sonya did not sleep all night. I went to her. It was something insane . . . I am tired and cannot stand it any more and feel quite ill. I feel I cannot be loving and

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reasonable, absolutely cannot. At present I want only to keep away and to take no part. There is nothing else I can do, or else I have seriously thought of escaping. Now then, show your Christianity. *C'est le moment ou jamais*. But I awfully want to go away. I doubt if my presence here is of any use to any one. Help me, my God, teach me. There is only one thing I want to do. not my will, but Thine. I write and ask myself: Is it true? Am I posing to myself? Help me, help me, help me!"

About fifteen months later (October 28, 1910) he left his home and family in order to spend his last days in accord with his doctrine. During this flight he died at the small railway station, Astapovo.

CHAPTER VII
TOLSTOY AND THE SEXUAL PROBLEM

VII

TOLSTOY AND THE SEXUAL PROBLEM

I

THE ultimate test of a man's mentality is his personal solution of the sexual problem. For sex is that furnace through which pass and must pass practically all our vital problems. It is so closely connected with our social and spiritual factors that the cultural level of individuals and communities is most of all indicated by their attitude towards sex. The rise of a race is always accompanied by the health of its sexual instinct; the decay by the reduction of sex to lust and sensuality.

There are, of course, several different stages in the evolution of sex. In primitive communities it exists only for the sake of the race as such. The need of a mate as an individual complement is so little felt by men of patriarchal society that marriages are usually arranged by the parents even without interference on the part of prospective bridegrooms. But after the

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process of differentiation of such a community into conscious individuals, sex ceases to be a mere racial agent—it becomes individualised. And it is only at this stage that conscious personal Love in a higher sense can be born. For it is here that man can become more concerned with his own self-realisation through Love than with the race in a patriarchal sense. He himself chooses his beloved, his wife, in whom he craves to find his complement. He also projects into her all his better self. The patriarchal ideal of a prolific matron is now replaced by the ideal of a perfect and pure Woman.

However, at this very stage we see also the painful division between Sex and Love. No sooner has sex become individualised (*i.e.*, torn away from the race as such) than it shows a tendency to exist only for its own sake, and unless it is raised by profound love, it easily degenerates into sensuality and lust. The contest between love and sex eventually decides whether love will be destroyed by sex, or whether sex will be sublimated and purified by love. And this contest manifests all the possibilities between the ideal of Woman and the ideal of mere Female—between Dante's seraphic love for Beatrice and the gross sensualism of decaying civilisations.

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"I can't endure the thought that a man of lofty mind and heart begins with the ideal of the Madonna and ends with the ideal of Sodom," exclaims Dostoevsky's Mitya Karamazov. "What is still more awful is that a man with the ideal of Sodom in his soul does not renounce the ideal of Madonna, and his heart may be on fire with that ideal, genuinely on fire, just as in his days of youth and innocence. Yes, man is broad, too broad, indeed. I would have him narrower."

It is the painful tension between such extremes that often leads to one-sided solutions of the sexual problem in single individuals: either to mere sensual affirmation of sex, or to the ascetic negation of it. It may, and often does, lead also to an alternation between them. Yet neither the one nor the other is a real solution, but only a misunderstanding: in both cases sex is stripped of all Mystery and looked upon merely as a physiological factor—with this difference, that a sensualist accepts it in this aspect, while an ascetic proclaims it as an evil against which he strives with the greater vehemence the more he feels in himself the lurking danger of the "flesh." Such puritanical asceticism is often only inverted depravity, and is equally dangerous to the ideal of that higher life where "flesh" is not suppressed but ennobled through

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spirit. In this ultimate stage of a transmuted Sex the so-called desires of the flesh may cease altogether—not through asceticism, but through the explosion of the *whole* individual in that dynamic universal love which brings us nearer to the pulse of cosmic life than any learned prattle about the riddles of the world.

If humanity ever reaches this height of over-individual and all-embracing love, it will reach—through it and not through sober moral recipes—the pitch of earthly perfection. Fleshly desires will cease simply because our “libido” will be merged in an ecstasy which is incomparably greater than a merely physiological, or merely “spiritual,” view could ever give to man. With such a state of perfection, the destiny of mankind on this planet might be fulfilled; and in that case its propagation would probably cease of itself.

However, this religious transcendence of sex as such has a very dangerous opposite pole—on the “puritanic” plane of perfection. It consists in a personal negation of sex and of all that is connected with it as something immoral, brutal and squalid. Such a negation, which is usually the result of moral self-disgust, might go so far as to preach self-extinction for *ascetic* reasons. Finding the

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antinomies of sex too tormenting, one chooses the line of least resistance and barricades oneself in asceticism. On the other hand, those who see in sex one of the main factors that lead toward disunion (through the egoistic ties binding a man to his wife and children and to property) will be equally inclined to revile sex, identifying it with sensuality and thus reducing its mystery to mere squalor which must be wiped away for the sake of a "godly" life.

Both of these motives we find hand in hand, in Tolstoyanism.

II

Tolstoy's early diaries amply prove that in his "libido" there was a complete split between the attraction towards the Woman and that towards the Female. Although he had been dreaming of a pure woman and of a moral family life, as we see in *Youth* and *A Squire's Morning*, he indulged at the same time in debaucheries. This split might have been fostered in his younger days by unconscious personal resentment and despair because of his unattractive exterior: he naturally saw the more defects in women the less successful he was in his attention

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to them. The result was that even his tremendous potency for real love involuntarily sought for other channels—apart from, or even against sex. “I was too egotistical to become accustomed to my position, and consoled myself, like the fox, by assuring myself that the grapes were still green; that is to say, I endeavoured to despise all the pleasures derived from the pleasing exterior, and I strained every nerve of my mind and imagination to find solace in proud solitude.”

It is enough to combine this circumstance with Tolstoy's inherent tendency towards the group-soul on the one side, and to rational moralising on the other, in order to see the far-reaching psychological importance of the following passage from *Youth*: “There are three kinds of love: (1) Beautiful love; (2) Self-sacrificing love; (3) Active love. I do not speak of the love of a young man for a young girl, and hers for him: I fear these tendernesses, and I have been so unfortunate in life as never to have seen a single spark of truth in this species of love, but only a lie, in which sentiment, connubial relations, money, a desire to bind and to unbind one's hands, have to such an extent confused the feeling itself, that it has been impossible to disentangle it. I am speaking of

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the love for man, which, according to the greater or lesser power of soul, concentrates itself upon one, upon several, or pours itself upon many: of the love of mother, father, brother, children, for a comrade, friends, fellow-countrymen,—in short, of love for humanity.”

This kind of love may, however, often serve but as a refuge from our unsatisfied craving for the love of a woman; and the stronger our unfulfilled craving the more inclined shall we be to persuade ourselves that “the grapes are green,” and to take revenge upon women by reviling them, by considering them an evil. Desperate and passionate natures may even take revenge upon love itself by deliberately trying to make it appear loathsome, and thus stifle their glowing desire for real love—in their own moral disgust. This artificial disgust is, of course, always proportionate to the suppressed need of a woman’s love.

Already in the diary of his undergraduate years in Kazan (1846 or 1847) Tolstoy wrote these lines, “I will set myself another rule—as follows: Regard feminine society as an inevitable evil of social life, and in so far as you can, avoid it. From whom, indeed, do we learn voluptuousness, effeminacy, frivolity in everything, and many another vice, if not from

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women? Who is responsible for the fact that we lose such feelings inherent in us as courage, fortitude, prudence, equity, and so forth, if not woman? Woman is more receptive than man, and, during the ages of virtue, was better than we were; but now, in the age of corruption and vice, she has become worse." And a couple of years later (1852) he made this entry: "Love does not exist. There exists the physical need for intercourse, and the rational need for a mate in life . . ."

But having reduced love to mere "physical need for intercourse," he already runs the risk either of deliberate depravity, or of deliberate asceticism. In fact, he often changes from one to the other. And the greater his physical vitality the stronger moralising counter-measures he must invent in order to keep himself in check. The need of love itself, on the other hand, may seek for a last outlet in an abstract humanitarianism, in tearful sentimentality, or in the best case in that de-sexualised marriage which is characterised in Tolstoy's feeble, old-maidish story *Walk in the Light While There is Light*, or in this finale of his *Family Happiness* :—

"And I began kissing his little stomach, his hand and his little head, scarcely covered with soft hair. My husband came up to me; I

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quickly covered the child's face and uncovered it again.

"'Ivan Sergeitch!' said my husband, chucking him under the chin. But quickly I hid Ivan Sergeitch again. No one but I was to look at him for long. I glanced at my husband, his eyes laughed as he watched me, and for the first time for a long while it was very easy and sweet to me to look into them.

"With that day ended my love-story with my husband, the old feeling became a precious memory never to return: but the new feeling of love for my children and the father of my children laid the foundation of another life, happy in quite a different way, which I am still living at the present moment."

It is not a mere chance that Tolstoy made this definition of "family happiness" shortly after that period of his life when he indulged alternately in violent fits of sensuality and in equally violent reactions against them. And as he himself acknowledges, he succumbed to the temptations of the "flesh" only too often. Hence his consistent hatred of woman even after his marriage (in which he had thirteen children). Like every fanatical Puritan, Tolstoy hated in woman his own suppressed sensuality of which he was continually afraid. Even in his

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posthumous stories (*The Devil, After the Ball, Father Sergius*) he gives such vivid descriptions of the possession with sex that one can easily understand why he was so hostile towards woman.

"He (Tolstoy) talks most of God, of peasants, and of woman," says Gorky in his reminiscences. "Woman, in my opinion, he regards with implacable hostility and loves to punish her. . . . It is the hostility of the male who has not succeeded in getting all the pleasure he could, or it is the hostility of spirit against the degrading impulses of flesh. But it is hostility, and cold, as in *Anna Karenina*."

"Woman is the tool of the devil," complains Tolstoy in his diary as late as 1898 (August 3), that is, after thirty-six years of married life. "She is generally stupid, but the devil lends her his brains when she works for him. Here you see, she has done miracles of thinking, far-sightedness, constancy, in order to do something nasty; but as soon as something not nasty is needed, she cannot understand the simplest thing; she cannot see farther than the present moment, and there is no self-control and no patience."

"Marriage is not happiness, but always suffering which man pays for the satisfaction of his sex desire," he writes on October 13, 1899;

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and, a month later (November 20): "For seventy years I have been lowering and lowering my opinion of women and still it has to be lowered more and more."

In the same year he said to Goldenweiser : " You must not talk about it, and I tell it you in secret: woman is generally so bad that the difference between a good and a bad woman scarcely exists. . . . I shall one day write about women. When I am quite old, and my digestion is completely out of order, and I am still looking out into the world through one eye, then I shall pop my head out and tell them : ' That's what you are ! ' and disappear completely, or they would peck me to death. . . . "

III

If we now turn for a moment to the Tolstoy of the first period, when he was mainly a full-blooded artist, we may perhaps be surprised to find that no one understands and shows more deeply the innocence of true passion than Tolstoy himself—at least as long as the rigid Puritan does not intervene. You will seek in vain for a purer and more innocent awakening of the woman than that which we find in the young

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Natasha Rostova, in Kitty, or in the heroine of the *Family Happiness* (in the first part). And does not the great, and through its very greatness, innocent passion of Anna Karenina justify itself from the standpoint of life, although Tolstoy tries to condemn it from the standpoint of his "rules"? The tragic love of Anna for Vronsky is, after all, more convincing in its sincerity and even more moral on the plane of living life than Tolstoy's moralising.

Yet, whenever dealing with marriage and married life itself, Tolstoy shows, in those years, a "reasonable" and even calculating patriarchal strain mixed with the tendency towards a not very elevating kind of prosperity. It was with Tolstoy's silent approval that Nicholas Rostov gave up the devoted Sonya in order to make a *marriage d'argent*. In the epilogue of the novel Tolstoy even makes a remark—without the slightest tinge of irony—that Rostov was happy ever afterwards: "And doubtless because Nicholas did not allow himself to entertain the idea that he was doing anything for the sake of others, or for the sake of virtue, everything he did was fruitful. His fortune rapidly increased; the neighbouring serfs came to beg him to purchase them, and long after his death the peasants preserved a reverent memory of his

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rule." The romantic Natasha herself becomes very reasonable after her marriage (and so does Kitty in *Anna Karenina*): she pays little attention to her appearance and dissolves, as it were, in her cares for children, *i.e.*, for the race.

Together with this racial tendency, we find in him, at the very beginning, also the vegetative ideal of quiet happiness (with a sprinkle of philanthropy) in rural surroundings. "I and my wife will always live amidst the tranquil, poetical, country Nature, with our children, perhaps with an old aunt. We have a common love, the love for our children, and both of us know that our destiny is goodness," dreams the chief character of *A Squire's Morning*. And the hero of *Family Happiness* muses of a similar existence: "The quiet, lonely life in our country solitude, with the possibility of being benefactors to people to whom it is easy to do good, and who are so unaccustomed to it, then work, work which brings its own reward, then rest, one's books, music, love for some congenial spirit,—such is my ideal of happiness, and I cannot conceive of a higher."

Sexual love in general Tolstoy divided in those days into two categories: the virtuous and the forbidden. Pierre and Natasha, Nicholas Rostov and Princess Marie, Levin and Kitty, belong to the virtuous group; in consequence they are

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amply rewarded; while Helen Kuragin, her brother Anatol, Anna Karenina and Vronsky represent either mere desire or imprudent irrational passion for which they must be punished. And who is a greater expert in dealing out moral punishments than Tolstoy?

On the whole one can say that his conception of mature love always remained rather *terre-a-terre*. At any rate, it rarely soared above the mentioned categories. But after his conversion he showed a growing inclination to obliterate the dividing line even between these two groups and to lower the conception of sexual love in general to such an extent as to identify it with mere lust, or even with prostitution.

The *Kreutzer Sonata* is a striking example in this respect. From a merely literary standpoint this story is one of Tolstoy's least artistic works, but it is a precious illustration of that militant puritanism which may unconsciously touch depravity—through the very excess of morals.¹

¹ In early spring, 1891, Tolstoy himself wrote to one of his friends apropos his *Kreutzer Sonata* (which could appear in Russia only after a special permission of the Czar): "Yesterday my wife arrived from Petersburg, where she had seen the Czar, and had spoken to him about me and my writings—quite unnecessarily. He promised to allow the publication of the 'Kreutzer Sonata,' a thing which does not please me at all. There must have been something bad in my 'Kreutzer Sonata.' I am entirely fed up with it, with every reminiscence of it. There was something nasty in the motives which dominated me while I wrote it. . . . I will endeavour to avoid this in future, in case I happen to finish something or other."

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Poznyshev, the hero of the story, pours out—after having murdered his wife in a fit of disgust and jealousy—his puritanic indictments, which are those of Tolstoy himself. This is his definition of love between the two sexes: “Women are well aware that what is commonly called sublime and poetical love depends not upon moral qualities, but on frequent meetings, and on the style in which the hair is done up, and on the colour and cut of the dress. Ask an experienced coquette eagerly bent upon captivating a man, which of the two risks she would rather incur: that of being convicted of deceit, cruelty, or even of immoral conduct in presence of the man whom she is endeavouring to attract, or of appearing before him in a badly made and ugly dress. She will unhesitatingly prefer the first. For she well knows that men are continually lying about lofty sentiments; that what they really want is only the woman herself, and that they consequently condone every species of bad conduct, while they will never forgive a dress that is badly cut, tastelessly trimmed, or suggestive of *mauvais ton*. Every coquette is keenly conscious of this; every innocent girl is unconsciously aware of this. Hence these odious jerseys and projections behind, these exposed shoulders, arms,

and almost open breasts. Women, particularly those who have passed through the masculine school, are alive to the fact that conversations on lofty themes are mere hollow phrases, that the object of a man's desire is the person, and whatever sets that out in its most seductive light; and they act in strict accordance with this knowledge."

Reducing in this way the man to the male, and the woman to the mere female, Poznyshev generalises his own case, discovering its real cause in not fulfilling that law of life which requires that every one should "fire off the charge of energy taken in the shape of food, by muscular exertions":—

"Last spring a number of peasants were working in our neighbourhood on a railway embankment. The usual food of a strong peasant when engaged in light field labour consists of bread, *kvass*, onions, and this keeps him alive, active and healthy. When he enters into the service of a railway company his food is porridge, and a pound of meat daily. This meat he gives out again in the form of sixteen hours' labour, driving a wheelbarrow of thirty *poods*, which is just as much as he is able to perform. We, on the other hand, eat game, meat and fish, besides sundry, and other kinds of

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heat-giving food and drink. Now where, may I ask, does all this go? To produce excesses, abnormal excitement, which passing through the prism of our artificial life, assumes the form of falling in love. . . . Thus I fell in love, as all men do, and none of the characteristic traits of that state were wanting. Ecstasies, tenderness and poetry were all there, in appearance at least, but in reality my love was the result of the contrivances of the mamma and the dressmakers on the one hand, and good dinners and inactivity on the other. If, on the one hand, there had been no boating excursions, no dressmakers to arrange wasp-like waists, and so on; had my wife been dressed in a plain gown and stayed at home; and if, on the other hand, I had been leading a normal life, I should not have fallen in love, and all that took place subsequently and in consequence of that, would never have occurred."

Poznyshev, however, does not stop here. He pushes his argument to its furthest extreme and then constructs on it, with dogmatic self-assurance, his theories about love in general:—

"What is peculiarly revolting about all this, is that whereas in theory love is described as an ideal state, a sublime sentiment, in practice it is a thing which cannot be mentioned or called

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to mind without a feeling of disgust. It was not without cause that nature made it so. But if it be revolting let it be proclaimed so without any disguise. Instead of that, however, people go about preaching and teaching that it is something splendid and sublime."

The notorious "tool of the devil," the woman, also gets her due from the indignant Poznyshev. In his opinion, "woman has transformed herself into an object of pleasure of such terrible effect that a man cannot calmly approach her. No sooner does a man draw near a woman than he falls under the power of her spell, and his senses are forthwith paralysed. Even in former times I always felt ill at ease in the presence of a lady arrayed in all the splendour of ball-dress; at present I positively shudder at the sight, for I recognise therein a palpable danger to people in general, a danger that has no legal right to exist; and I feel prompted to call in a policeman, to appeal for protection against this danger that threatens me, or to insist on its removal or suppression."

But here again Tolstoy's *leit-motif*, the "Christian" Nirvana, takes its own. He is for complete abolition of sex, not only because the latter is abominable in itself, but also because it diverts us from that static love of God and of humanity

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which ought to secure at last perfect peace and tranquillity. As Tolstoy says elsewhere, "the Christian's ideal is love to God and to one's neighbour; it is the renunciation of self for the service of God and one's neighbour. Whereas sexual love, marriage, is service of self, and therefore, in any case, an obstacle to the service of God and man; consequently, from a Christian point of view, a fall, a sin." And again: "Having become a Christian, be it in ever so feeble a degree if only the feeling be sincere, one cannot help regarding 'being in love,' from this higher position, as a feeling from which it is desirable to become free. And why could you not be content," he asks, "with this Christian, brotherly love?"¹

It is interesting that in *Resurrection*, too, Tolstoy treats sexual love from this very standpoint. Although it is not difficult to feel (between the lines) that Nekhlyudov's love for Katyusha Maslova—a kind of insincere, cold, and in essence, rather selfish "pity" on

¹ Yet in a letter to his friend, the painter, N. N. Gué, Tolstoy writes concerning one of the first Tolstoyan colonies, in which this very ideal had been practised. "A——n visited me in the autumn, he and all of them live wonderfully. For example, the sexual problem they solve by complete abstinence, a holy life. But—may Lord forgive my sins—my impression was a heavy one. Not that I envy their life out of my sloth; no, I recognise their moral height and rejoice in it as if it were my own; yet something is wrong in all that. Dear, do not show this letter, it might grieve them."

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Tolstoyan principles—becomes at times repellent to Tolstoy himself, he cannot abstain from emphasising his ingrained hatred of sex by further, even more outspoken illustrations. He confronts, for instance, the former prostitute and murderess, Katyusha, with the pretty political exile, Mary Pavlovna, whom he describes as so exceeding selfless that “the interest of her whole life lay in searching for opportunities to serve others just as the sportsman searches for game.” And this girl of noble origin, who had renounced home, wealth, comfort and freedom in order to serve others, soon found a common ground on which she could meet the ex-prostitute Katyusha even as a friend. To quote Tolstoy’s own words, “they were united by the repulsion they both felt for sexual love. The one loathed that love, having experienced all its horrors; the other, never having experienced it, looked on it as something incomprehensible, and at the same time as something repugnant and offensive to human dignity.”

Is, then, love nothing more than what a professional prostitute knows about it? And is it not unpardonable on the part of Tolstoy that in his instinctive tendency to “lower” the woman he tries to lower—through his very moralism—also love as such to mere mud, in

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order to exalt at its expense self-effacement or, in the best case, bald philanthropy on principle?

Another political prisoner, Simonson, with whom we make acquaintance in *Resurrection*, formulated during his previous exile in the province of Archangel a "religious teaching (on Tolstoyan lines) which governed all his activity." And the highest aim of that teaching was celibacy. In full agreement with Tolstoy, he "thought that procreation was a lower function of man, the higher function being to serve already existing lives. He found support for his theory in the fact that there exist phagocytes in the blood. Celibates, according to his opinion, were like phagocytes, whose mission it is to help the weak and sick parts of the organism. From the moment he came to this conclusion, he lived accordingly, though in his youth he had been dissipated; and he considered himself, and Mary Pavlovna as well, to be human phagocytes."

IV

For further conclusions we may refer again to Poznyshev in *Kreutzer Sonata*. They are logical and so clear that it is impossible to misunderstand their real meaning. This is how

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he goes on in his exhortations: "If the object for which humanity exists is bliss, goodness, love, or by whatever other name you like to call it, if it is what the ancient prophets have proclaimed it to be, namely, that all men be united in love, that their swords be turned into ploughshares, and so on, what hinders the accomplishment of this object? The passions do. Now, of all the passions, the strongest, the most wicked, the most stubborn, is the passion of the senses. Consequently if we succeed in rooting up the passions, and with them this last and most powerful, the prophecies will come to pass; men will be united by the bond of love, the aim and mission of humanity will have been fulfilled, and there will no longer be any reason for the further existence of the human race.

"As long as humanity subsists, it tends towards an ideal; and its ideal is assuredly not that of rabbits who increase and multiply as much as possible; it is an ideal of goodness attainable by continence, abstemiousness, purity. Towards this ideal people have always been and still are tending.

"Look now at the upshot of all this: love, passion, appears in the *rôle* of a safety-valve. The present generation of men has not accomplished the mission for which it is here in

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the world, and why? Because of its passions, the strongest of which is the passion of sense. On the other hand, such passion not being extirpated, a new generation arises, and humanity has the renewed possibility of arriving at the goal by the efforts of the new men. If they are unsuccessful, it is for the same reason, and failure brings with it the possibility of success later on, and so on *ad infinitum*, till such times as the object is accomplished, the prophecy comes to pass and all men are joined together in union . . .

“But perhaps you dislike the form in which I have expressed all this? Perhaps you are an evolutionist? but even so, you cannot fail to see the truth of this contention. The highest race of animals is the human race. In order to hold its own in the struggle with other races it must keep closely together, unite like a swarm of bees, and not go on endlessly multiplying and increasing; and like the bees it should bring up the sexless, that is to say, it ought to aim at restraint, and not by any means contribute to inflame passions, as our social life seems deliberately instituted to do. . . . The human race will cease? Yes; but is it possible that any one, no matter from what point of view he contemplated the world, could have even

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entertained a doubt about that? Why, it is inevitable as death. All ecclesiastical doctrines are based on the theory that this world of ours will sooner or later come to an end; modern science propagates the same teaching. Why should we be surprised that ethics inculcates the same lesson?"

No arguments are necessary to prove that these deductions are the inevitable outcome of Tolstoyanism. They show once again Tolstoy's weariness with his own self, and his longing for Nirvana. They may even contain a fair amount of unconscious hatred of humanity. "This man has never loved anybody," Turgenev once said of Tolstoy, and—who knows?—he was perhaps partly right. Tolstoy's abstract love of men was above all the expression of his own personal need, the need of a fusion with the "aggregate of personalities"; but apart from this impulse, it was more like pity than anything else—and pity is usually mingled with conscious or unconscious disgust. "To love an individual man, one has to be blinded," Tolstoy confesses in his diary (1896, August 1). "Without being blinded one can love only God, but people can be pitied, which means to love in a Godly way."

This love of humanity—the intellectual "love

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in a Godly way"—often seems very similar to Nekhlyudov's love for the fallen Katyusha Maslova. There is more principle in it than real warmth or sympathy. And behind the principle one can feel the clenched teeth and a passionate will to love—to love even in spite of one's loathing. Tolstoy's very recipe for a universal suicide may have its root in the hidden disgust with 'mankind' (which again is in most cases the result of moral self-disgust). For, if procreation can be achieved only at the price of moral pollution, then the very fact that humanity exists is immoral. Consequently, a "virtuous" end of all human beings is the best thing that could possibly happen to them, and the sooner it happens the better. In Tolstoy's thoughts about the relations of the sexes (collected by his ardent follower, V. Chertkov) we find, among others, these lines: "What is it that so revolts men, in the idea of the possibility that a moral righteous life will also bring the race to an end? Perhaps the one and the other will coincide. In a Shaker article this is even suggested. It is stated there, 'Why should not men by abstinence deliver themselves from violent death?' Excellent."

It would be unjust to pass over in silence Tolstoy's sincere crusade against contemporary

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laxity of morals, against the decay of motherhood and of modern family life in general, as well as against all those factors and institutions which directly or indirectly foster depravity. On these subjects he said much that was true and useful, although perhaps not quite new. Yet the remedies he offers will hardly be of great help, because they are unnatural. The problem which modern humanity is facing is not how to suppress human nature, but how to ennoble and raise it. All attempts at unconditional suppression lead only to distortions, and these are equally fatal whether they take place on a moral, or on an immoral plane. Tolstoy only replaces the immoral distortions by the moral ones.

CHAPTER VIII
TOLSTOY AND NIETZSCHE

VIII

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I

THOSE few individuals of the last century who were sufficiently unbiased to see that the one-sided development of our technical civilisation inevitably grows at the expense of the inner man, were helpless in the presence of the modern Tower of Babel which threatens to crush the whole of humanity, after having already crushed all higher reasons for its existence. Eventually they either shut their eyes, consoling themselves with self-concocted illusions, or else became prey to that hopeless pessimism which, a few decades ago, made a picturesque contrast to the optimistic dreams of prosperous "Kulturphilistines." But there was still a third issue in the various attempts at a theoretical transvaluation of values.

Such attempts gave to many individuals the last refuge from the appalling inner misery and emptiness of our "progress"—a refuge in

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which they could vent freely all their protest and indignation. Yet, when we begin to look at the transvaluers themselves we notice that, on the whole, they have only one point in common: a complete negation of the existing state of things. In everything else they seem to differ so much as to advocate entirely opposite views and proposals. What one of them holds for black, another proclaims as white, a third again says it is green; and so the further one proceeds the more convinced one becomes that there is hardly less confusion of tongues among the reformers themselves than among those they wish to reform. Of this the views of Tolstoy and Nietzsche supply a typical example.

There is no doubt that the most passionate attempts at a complete change of our life came from Tolstoy and Nietzsche. Both of them said frankly what they saw, trying at the same time to put a *veto* on the whole tendency of our historical evolution. "Humanity must justify its existence and set up aims worthy of it!" This was their cry. However, the aims which in their opinion ought to justify mankind are so different that they must entirely exclude one another.

The reasons for this contrast are not far to seek—they are organic. The transvaluations of

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both Nietzsche and Tolstoy were largely the expression of their personal needs; that is to say, their instinct of self-preservation urged them towards those views and ideas which would most probably help them to endure the pain of their inner conflicts, the pain of their own existence.

And this is perhaps as it should be. For the times when a cleverly manufactured logical system was called philosophy are perhaps over. We prefer the experience of a throbbing and really living soul to even the best intellectual "systems." Profound philosophy must be a personal confession of a profound life—if it wishes to belong to life and not only to professors and libraries. For a thought is vital not in itself, but only in so far as we feel in it the price which has been paid for its conquest; in so far as we feel in it the living, suffering and struggling personality. Even an error that has been lived boldly and deeply may be more valuable than hundreds of truths which have been only "thought." Elements of a lived philosophy we find in both Tolstoy and Nietzsche.

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II

Even a cursory glance at the works of these two men convinces us that they are the opposite poles in every respect. The fundamental difference between them begins in their very manner of looking at things, in their attitudes towards their own selves, towards reality and man.

First of all, the message of Nietzsche as a whole is an absolute affirmation, that of Tolstoy an absolute negation, of the individual as such. It is the quality of the species man that matters to Nietzsche, and his entire sociology is nothing but an anxious search for those conditions which could produce and maintain the highest "biological" type of man.¹ In the course of this search he proclaims inequality, differentiation, as the very basis of all intense and vigorous life. Moreover, he desires by all possible means to foster this inequality through deliberate social division and through the establishment of a functional order of rank whose root-idea is that the quantity ought to exist for the sake of the quality. An utter disgust with his own age drove him to the

¹ See the study, *Nietzsche and Modern Consciousness*, by the same author. (Collins.)

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inebriating vision of his superman, who is not afraid to dictate higher aims even by means of the iron rod if necessary. Hence he began to look upon humanity as a sculptor looks upon the stone out of which he wants to hew a statue, little worrying about the pieces which must be cut and broken in order that the statue may be created. He acknowledged only the love for the future and farthest ones, and in the name of this love he preached hardness to oneself, hardness to one's "neighbour."

Invert all this, and you will obtain the basic ideas of Tolstoy, who values the personality only in so far as it sacrifices itself to the number and to the compactness of the number. The individual self-assertion, which Nietzsche considers as the holiest duty of every one, represents for Tolstoy the original sin of man and therefore the very spring of all evil on earth. Nietzsche discards God with almost hysterical vehemence, simply in order to procure to man that illimitable freedom of self-will which makes him the only divinity in the universe—the freedom of the individual man-God. Tolstoy, on the other hand, instinctively clings to God, whom he conceives in such a way as to find in Him, above all, the primeval *antithesis* to all individualisation whatsoever; Tolstoy's God

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is the unconscious projection of his own "Categorical Imperative"—the ultimate sanction of individual self-effacement.

Divining even in the greatest altruism only masked selfishness, Nietzsche was cynically frank about it and never missed an opportunity of ridiculing those who try to make a virtue out of their own weakness and impotence. He maintained that the open or veiled "will to power" is the only inner agent of our actions, and therefore naturally denied those transcendental categories of good and evil which Tolstoy considered as eternal—as given once for ever, and obligatory for all men. But while standing thus for a complete relativity of morals, Nietzsche taught that the value of an action depends only on the inherent value of the individual who performs it; while for Tolstoy the individual as such has no value, and consequently his actions, can be measured only by their conformity to the "eternal" moral categories. To Tolstoy's stern, "Thou must!" Nietzsche opposes the formula: There is no good and no evil in itself. All things are lawful—in so far as our old moral premises are concerned. But in order not to be crushed by this truth you must be strong enough to create new values—the highest conceivable values which could justify your own

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existence and the existence of a humanity without God. And its justification is in the Superman.

If Tolstoy's ethic is based on categories, Nietzsche's moral valuations are, above all, those of taste. He is beyond good and evil only with regard to "eternal" categories; but apart from this, he measures everything from the standpoint of what he calls noble and ignoble. And ignoble is for him all that comes from weakness, from the absence of a striving will to overcome the present man.

While Tolstoy's gospel has in view a stateless community of meek and good men united in that pre-individual love which alone can give tranquillity and happiness on earth, Nietzsche advocates the necessity of powerful men who are strong enough to laugh at all "easy yokes"; men who can boldly look at life in its most horrible aspects and yet make it worth living. Instead of an escape from reality he requires a tragic courage to it, a courage *à tout prix*. Therefore he insists on the creative value of hardness towards oneself and towards others. A hard and dangerous life is one of his first demands. For our strength and endurance grow in proportion with those dangers which we are able to overcome. In Nietzsche's opinion, the

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risky and the *evil* side of existence is necessary for the growth of life. It is also necessary for the sake of that higher goodness which is not a result of weakness, but of one's overflowing power and abundance—the goodness at which only those arrive who have first conquered the right to it.

Nietzsche stands, to put it very roughly, for the ultimate aristocratic-aesthetic, and Tolstoy for the ultimate democratic-ethical, ideal of human society.

III

Yet the question as to what Tolstoy and Nietzsche teach is perhaps less interesting than the question: *why* do they teach it? Why indeed did they come to such opposite ideals and conclusions, although in essence they were probably equally well-meaning. Again the answer can be given only by psychology.

The truth is that both Tolstoy and Nietzsche were what one could call decadents—not in that shallow sense, of course, which Max Nordau once gave to this word.

It is rather difficult to define where exactly

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decadence begins. But as its starting-point is always fixed more or less arbitrarily, we shall not commit a great blunder in saying that decadence begins where one's personal will loses the wholeness of its direction, *i.e.*, where it becomes split and disrupted. This is sometimes the result of physical causes; but it can happen for spiritual reasons as well, even for spiritual reasons alone. A too intense introspection, or a refined intellectual and moral sensitiveness allied to the destructive modern scepticism, almost invariably leads to it, in spite of physical health. Moreover, an introspective "sickly conscience" always causes greater ravages in a vigorous and healthy body than in a physique which has already lost (or forfeited) its vitality. The more complicated and intense one's inner life in such cases, the more difficult it is to cope with the danger. One's very richness thus may become one's peril. As long as one's capacity for enthusiastic faith in higher values is preserved, an outlet can be easily provided. But when this capacity has withered, in the drought of modern scepticism, one is compelled to impose upon oneself deliberately both the values one needs and also the belief in them. Every one who wishes to "save" himself from the menacing drought,

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must perform this double task at his own risk—as best he can.

Such was the position of Tolstoy, and perhaps even more that of Nietzsche. Their philosophy was the life-buoy which saved them from drowning. That is to say, both of them instinctively stretched their hands after those elements from which they expected most help. And in order that this help should be the more efficient they amplified the scale of their own dilemma by transferring it to the whole of humanity. So they prescribed for the rest of mankind that very medicine which they themselves needed and wanted.

The diseased Nietzsche was only too aware of the debilities of his body; so he did his best to assert, through his will, the “biological” man against his over-developed spirit. He summoned all the resources of his undaunted mind chiefly in order to supply through it continuous streams of fresh vitality to his decaying physique. Tolstoy’s dilemma, on the other hand, was largely due to an exuberant bodily health and vitality which always defied his sensitive “sickly conscience.” Hence the “spiritual” Tolstoy tried to assert himself by turning against that very biological man whom Nietzsche exalted so much. Nietzsche crucified his spirit

Tolstoy and Nietzsche

on his flesh, and Tolstoy his flesh on his spirit, yet neither of them was saved. And the more they knew this the more passionately they insisted on the fact that they were what they professed, or, better, what they wished to be. Thus Tolstoy, whose strong physical instincts were of a primitive Pagan kind, did everything to prove that he was a Christian, *only* a Christian. Nietzsche again was by some of his basic instincts a latent Christian of the purest type; his private life could easily bear the scrutiny of the most virtuous Christian Puritan. Yet he scoffed at Christianity as no mere Pagan could, and wrote a number of morbid books chiefly in order to convince himself and others that he was the fiercest anti-Christian ever born.

Being an invalid, Nietzsche probably realised that Christianity was the only religion which could give him inner solace in his distress. But for this very reason he rejected it. Even had he been a believer, his Satanic pride would not have allowed him to humiliate himself when humility was personally advantageous. He would never "waggle his tail" before God, precisely because he needed Him—as the last and the only refuge from his own suffering. In his affliction he considered any whining, any philandering with philosophies or religions of

Tolstoy

comfort as unmanly and indecent. Therefore he preferred to increase his pain rather than shelter himself in a doctrine whose hidden inner motives he conceived as veiled fear of suffering and a craving for spiritual ease. On the other hand, Nietzsche derived from this very defiance a greater ecstasy than any passive religious resignation could have given him. He revelled in his own recklessness and endurance simply because this was the best way of converting his suffering into an illusion of power, or even into a well of defiant "joy."

Viewed in this light, Nietzsche's Promethean struggle with his Fate is more heroic than Tolstoy's quietism with its promise of "good pastures," happiness, tranquillity, and other advantages. While Nietzsche bravely faced his own problem, Tolstoy wished, above all, to escape it. So he embraced Christianity as a kind of "bottom from which there is no place to fall."

Tolstoy is all for self-effacement in fulfilling what he calls his "Father's Will," chiefly because in this alone he hopes to find calm and happiness. Nietzsche again roars like a lion: "Be what thou art! Fulfil thine individual creative function in the world—regardless whether this brings

Tolstoy and Nietzsche

you happiness or not!" Zarathustra's last words are: "Did I then live for my happiness?—I lived for my *work*!"

IV

One could give numerous examples to the effect that Nietzsche's "Categorical Imperative" was at least as strong as that of Tolstoy. And yet, these two Imperatives exclude each other everywhere, and most of all on the moral plane. Nietzsche represents the highest possibility of a Western man who makes a dangerous somersault in order to overcome both himself and the West. Tolstoy, on the other hand, with all his negation of Western values, represents a kind of Europeanised East; psychologically he is not so much a real Christian as a weary Eastern Nihilist in pseudo-Christian garb.

However, in so far as their doctrines are concerned, they have one substantial mistake in common: they confused, or even identified, selfness with selfishness. The result was that Nietzsche accepted selfishness in the name of selfness, and Tolstoy rejected selfness together with selfishness because he did not distinguish it from the latter. At the same time one can

Tolstoy

see that, although their directions are opposite, the methods of coping with their own dilemmas are analogous, for each of them tries to suppress one half of his personality for the benefit of the other half. But as suppression is not yet victory, they both remained in a state of warfare: that warfare by which the whole of European consciousness is and will remain lacerated, until we find a synthetic outlet on a new and higher plane. And this plane is certainly beyond both Nietzsche and Tolstoy.

CHAPTER IX
CONCLUSION

IX

CONCLUSION

THE world-war has made a definite break not only in the history of contemporary politics and economics, but also in the evolution of the entire modern mentality. In sweeping away so cruelly all our past ideals and idols, it has taught us a new caution, not to take for granted any appearance, and to be inquisitive also in those cases where we should like to shut our eyes and to admire. And so, before having the right to adopt "new values" we are now obliged to see face to face the valuers themselves. Their ideas alone are no longer sufficient.

Approached in such manner, these great moderns of the last century—Tolstoy, Nietzsche, Dostoevsky, Ibsen—remind one of Michelangelo's giant Prisoners: they are still in fetters in spite of their efforts to free themselves. They are half-free, and half-freedom is often more unbearable than complete slavery. Consequently, they can be our teachers of life only in

Tolstoy

so far as they show us how to surpass them. Mere "ideas," theories or doctrines, can be here very misleading if taken apart from that individual suffering, loneliness and human despair by which they were generated. What really matters is not the theories, but the man himself, with his virtues and weaknesses, his victories and defeats.

From this point of view, it is Tolstoy the sufferer that is nearer and dearer to us than Tolstoy the teacher or the "prophet." No one will, of course, dispute his greatness and his genius in art. But with regard to his teaching one can only say that it must be approached rather warily—precisely because of its "simple" and innocent exterior. Those who consider him unconditionally as a new apostle, or as a saint, misunderstand him at the very outset. But discarding such an illusion, we may find the track to the real Tolstoy whose tragedy of seeking and suffering is greater and more astounding than those saintly masks beneath which he occasionally tried to conceal it from the world. Besides, Tolstoy himself warns us against pious misconceptions of his personality, in a passage (written in 1892) which fitly concludes our present study:—

"I am no saint, and I have never given

Conclusion

myself out for a saint; I am a man liable to be carried away, and sometimes, or, more correctly, always, I say not fully what I think and feel: not because I do not wish to say it, but because I am unable, I frequently exaggerate, and often simply err.

“This is as regards words. As regards acts, it is even worse.

“I am an absolutely weak man, with vicious habits, who wishes to serve the God of truth, but who constantly misses the road.

“The moment I am looked upon as a man who cannot err, every mistake of mine appears either as a lie or as hypocrisy.

“But if I am understood to be a weak man, the disagreement between my words and my acts will be a sign of weakness, and not of lying and hypocrisy. And then I shall appear as what I really am: bad, but sincerely, with my whole soul, always and even now, wishing to be absolutely good, that is, a good servant of God.”

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